

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE: The Full Document
COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE
Creating Long Term Solutions to Deep Rooted Problems
“Moving from Complaint to Possibility...from Planning to Implementation”

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

According to an alarming report written in 2007, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was identified as leading the nation in homicide rates for African Americans. Answering the call to end the violence the **Coalition Against Violence** was created in February 2007 to identify and implement broad-based strategies to address this deadly issue.

Comprising youth, street level workers, community and religious leaders, representatives from education and government institutions and concerned citizens from Allegheny County, the **Coalition Against Violence** established a working group charged with the task of updating and expanding ‘Strategy 95’. This anti-violence document identified strategies to decrease the violence which was rampant in 1995. The working group met on 52 occasions from February 8, 2007 to March 6, 2008. Crossing neighborhoods, racial and ethnic backgrounds and spanning the generations, members of the working group were totally dedicated to their task. Through the diligence and effort of this broad spectrum of committed individuals, this document provides possibly the most comprehensive and detailed approach to impacting violence ever written by a group of concerned citizens of Metropolitan Pittsburgh!

Instead of lamenting the situation, the **Coalition Against Violence** urges everyone to act to *end* the violence! We ask that *all* citizens choose the action steps and strategies identified in this document which best suit their area of interest, concern *and/or* influence. We have provided an executive summary and a detailed table of contents which will make this task easier. After choosing *your* area of interest, we ask that you work to make the action points a reality. We ask that you partner with the **Coalition Against Violence** in “moving from complaint to possibility...from planning to implementation.”

The **Coalition Against Violence** commits this work as our contribution to Pittsburgh 250. We *all* need to work together to truly make Pittsburgh a city with less violence.

This work is dedicated to all those who have died as a result of violence and as a testimony that their deaths will not be in vain.

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The Entire Coalition Against Violence Working Group

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“Moving from Complaint to Possibility...from Planning to Implementation”

Executive Summary

The **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE DOCUMENT**, completed in 2008, contains strategies for action for the following stakeholders who have a responsibility to significantly impact the violence in our communities.

ATHLETES: Professional Athletes are in a unique position to gain access to people in power at a level not available to the average citizen. They have an extremely powerful opportunity to impact the violence in the communities where they play. Because youth look up to athletes at all levels – high school, college and professional – athletes have the responsibility of being positive role models. (Page 14)

THE BLACK BUSINESS COMMUNITY: All sectors of the community are urged to support African American business and business development throughout the region. The goal should include the development, implementation and maintenance of community-based businesses and employment initiatives that will create and establish viable businesses and living wage career and employment opportunities in and around designated African American communities. (Page 16)

THE BUSINESS AND CORPORATE COMMUNITY: The Business and Corporate community has a strong interest in improving the quality of life for everyone in the region. Business leaders have a responsibility to impact the violence by providing leadership and creating economic opportunities that will improve the conditions for those historically disadvantaged. (Page 19)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN: Civic participation is the foundation of democracy. The culture of civic participation must be brought back to a vibrant and relevant lifestyle if we are to be successful in our efforts to stop the increasing violence in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, cities and the region. Civic education helps prepare people, especially the young, to carry out their roles as citizens and to help them understand that one's vote *does* matter. Therefore, all citizens must be given the tools to fully participate in the democratic process. (Page 22)

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH: The recognition and valuing of the sacred breath within each human being is essential to the building of relationships that can ultimately reduce violence, while increasing respect and tolerance for oneself and others. Indeed, practicing spiritual disciplines can help people understand the meaning of the suffering and frustrations of others, channel their anger constructively, and thus reduce violence. Faith communities have an extremely important role to play in the transformation of communities. (Page 23)

EDUCATION: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY: Education is the foundation for financial success and responsible citizenship. Historically, the lack of education too frequently leads to the absence of hope, to wasted lives, violence, incarceration, and even death. The entire educational system, from pre-school to university, must be held accountable to the community. It must empower students to live creative, effective and contributing lives. (Page 25)

EDUCATION: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: Colleges and universities need to take advantage of the opportunities related to the multicultural diversity of their students by including courses that reflect that diversity. Colleges and universities should be at the forefront of this movement because of their unique position to educate young people from *all* backgrounds. Responsibility for the implementation of this initiative must come from the top. (Page 29)

FOUNDATIONS/CHARITABLE TRUSTS: Foundations have an important role to play in reducing violence, because of their ability to foster initiatives, which are holistic, comprehensive, systematic, evidence-based and empowering. Furthermore, foundations can play an important role by making innovative and non-traditional grants that may have a profound impact within the African American community. (Page 31)

GOVERNMENT: The purpose of government is to engage in activities to promote the “common good,” and to regulate and control social, political and economic spheres. Government entities must collaborate with local communities, businesses, and the philanthropic communities to impact violence. They should work to alleviate the root causes of violence and not merely control the violence. (Page 32)

GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION: A civil society is based on the people and lawful authorities working cooperatively to reduce the violence in our neighborhoods. The irresponsible use of guns, especially handguns, is to blame for a great percentage of the violence and killing that occurs in our neighborhoods. In addition, guns are frequently involved in accidental injuries. (Page 34)

THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: The healthcare system has a unique and important role in reducing the physical, emotional, and social problems that contribute to violence in our communities. It includes responsibilities related to partnership with communities and health care clients to provide health-related education and employment opportunities. Members of the health care system are called on to take the specific actions aimed at healing the wounds caused by violence and reducing the incidence of violence in our communities. (Page 36)

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: Juvenile justice officials can play a significant role in reducing the numbers of youth impacted by the violence in our communities through greater collaboration among parents and families, schools, human service organizations and other law enforcement institutions. (Page 38)

LAW ENFORCEMENT: Strategies and initiatives advocating gun violence reduction must be addressed immediately and will require unprecedented understanding and cooperation between all levels of the criminal justice system and the community. Teamwork is essential in law enforcement activity, as well as “community policing” environments in which citizens, community groups and the police work together as equal partners to attack and solve this problem. (Page 39)

THE MEDIA: The media must understand the role they play in perpetuating negative images of African Americans and other people of color. The media have the ability *and* the responsibility to present a more balanced picture of our youth and our community, instead of concentrating on the violence. (Page 41)

THE MEDIA: IMPACT OF RAP MUSIC: The entire entertainment industry, as well as a few rap stars, have gained huge financial benefits at the expense of the “hearts and minds” of millions of youth. Everyone – the entertainment media, music artists, parents, and the

community -- has to take responsibility for what our children and youth are seeing and hearing. (Page 43)

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: Restorative justice is an attempt to reverse the damaging impact of a criminal justice system that traditionally relied on a policy of punitive justice resulting in lengthy incarceration and the lifelong stigma of a criminal record. The goal of restorative justice is to repair the relationships between the offender and the other members of the community. (Page 45)

RESTORATIVE AND REHABILITATIVE JUSTICE: Having recognized the devastating effects their behavior has had on the life of the African American community, persons incarcerated and formerly incarcerated in the justice system can provide invaluable service for aiding the prevention of violence within our communities. (Page 47)

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS: Service organizations can have a significant effect on reducing violence by offering quality programs that engage youth and adults positively, as well as provide alternatives to violence. They can also provide activities which discourage other types of destructive behavior. (Page 50)

STREET LEVEL OUTREACH: Anyone who works at the street level helps reduce violence by providing outreach, activities and services. (Page 52)

YOUTH: Youth are encouraged to be the change they want to see in the world. They must become leaders in changing the culture of violence, particularly because they are far too often the *victims* of violence. (Page 54)



A Historic Perspective

On Thursday, February 8, 2007, in a standing room only news conference in the lobby of the James F. Henry Hill House Center, the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) and One HOOD responded to the alarming report that Pennsylvania led the nation in homicide rates for African Americans. B-PEP and One HOOD were joined by numerous community and religious leaders, the Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh, and other area politicians. As a result of the news conference, members of the community were brought together to form the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE**, a broad-based coalition consisting of community and religious leaders, police, representatives from education and government institutions, and concerned citizens of Allegheny County. The coalition now stands as an independent anti-violence collaborative with some administrative support from the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP).

The purpose and the role of the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** is to identify and facilitate the implementation of strategies and initiatives addressing the issues of violence and crime that plague many of the neighborhoods and communities throughout the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The coalition is committed to boldly and actively support as well as work in collaboration with organizations, agencies, initiatives, and programs already working quietly and diligently to help reduce violence.

The **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** established a working group in February 2007 which updated and significantly expanded "Strategy 95." The 1995 document identified strategies to decrease the violence at that time. The coalition's working group added two new sections. The Community Manifesto and the Role of the Family are preambles to the coalition's 2008 document containing specific strategies and actions for change.

The **COMMUNITY MANIFESTO** urges the African American community to seize the time to end the violence NOW! It is a call for citizens to take ownership of the problem and to provide the leadership necessary for finding bold, long-lasting and peaceful solutions to this problem threatening the lifeblood of the African American Community. *Our* institutions, *our* communities of faith, *our* schools and *our* families must set the tone. *As a call to action*, the **COMMUNITY MANIFESTO** contains definitive steps to accomplish far-reaching goals for ending the violence, and challenges us to reclaim the community *by any peaceful means necessary*.

The **ROLE OF THE FAMILY** document contains guidelines for helping families and parents raise their children in a productive, healthy and safe, *and* peaceful environment. The foundation of any community is the family. Because of its profound impact upon the strength and the health of families and the entire community, the violence that permeates our communities and neighborhoods is weakening that foundation.

We cannot expect the family to bear the heaviest burden *alone* when their children are both victims *and* perpetrators. Knowing that families cannot do it alone, the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** recognizes the role of the Community as the village. The *entire* village - institutions of faith, schools, businesses, the government, as well as social and educational institutions, and other caring people in the community – *must* provide the guidance, and the leadership, as well as the *will*, to end the cycle of violence that threatens both the family and the village.

A Call to Action

A Community Manifesto and The Role of the Family form the preamble to the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** 2008 document. These two chapters were specifically written as a *call to action* for the African American community. This community must boldly take ownership of this persistent problem which has had the most devastating impact on the communities in which African Americans live and work. As stated in the Community Manifesto, “we must seize the time to reclaim our community now.” As stated in the Role of the Family, the *village* must take the lead in healing the African American community. To significantly decrease the violence *everyone* living, working and worshipping in our neighborhoods and communities must come together.

Other strategies identified in the coalition’s comprehensive anti-violence document provide a role for *every* segment of society. The coalition strongly encourages the entire community to actively, diligently and forthrightly take *action* to help move forth the actions and strategies listed in this document. Therefore, the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** urges every citizen to read and share this document with their families, friends, workmates, classmates and others within their life circles.

We are convinced that these strategies, if implemented, can *significantly* impact the violence that has become far too common in our communities.

We ask that you do more than read this document. We ask that you *act* on the strategies identified. We ask that you be a partner to the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** in “moving from complaint to possibility...from planning to implementation.”



The **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** has also created the *COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORY* which identifies many of the agencies, organizations in the Metropolitan Pittsburgh area that provide anti-violence programs and services. Many of these services were retrieved from the United Way of Allegheny County website.

The Coalition’s Directory, as well as “Strategies for Change”: The Full Document will be available on the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) website at www.b-pep.net. It will also be available on the following websites: Center for Victims of Violence and Crime – www.cvvc.org; Communities In Action For Peace – www.capeace.org; The Hill House Association – www.hillhouse.org; The YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh -- www.ywcapgh.org; and The P.A.C.T. Initiative – www.makeapac.org. We encourage the community to fully utilize these programs and services. We also encourage those with resources to provide assistance to the agencies and organizations of their choice. Supporting and using any of these programs will go a long way in impacting the violence we seek to end!



A COMMUNITY MANIFESTO

The ruin of a nation begins in the home of its people – Ashanti Proverb

Today our community is at a crossroads. We are appalled at the shootings and senseless deaths of our young people. After all, these are our sons and daughters, our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews, and cousins who are killing each other. These are our children, who are dying or maimed at the hands of other children! In good conscience, we can no longer sit quietly, wringing our hands and shaking our heads at the latest news accounts announcing that another life has been lost. These seemingly senseless murders, though committed by few, have created a cycle of violence and trauma experienced by everyone living, working and owning businesses in our community. This culture of violence, which has threatened the lifeblood of our community, is so pervasive that if things do not change, the community will descend into further chaos and lawlessness. Yes, we are at a very important crossroads, and it is time for a change.

Now is the time to stand up and not be afraid to say, “No More!” When mothers have to snatch up their children in fear at a public event because of a shooting, something must be done! When our elders are so fearful they cannot walk outside of their homes, something must be done! When schoolchildren witness a person wounded and bloodied outside of their school building, something must be done! We are living in a culture of violence where a few people, bent on death and destruction, have held the entire community hostage! Something must be done!

There is a multitude of underlying causes for this culture of violence that are so pervasive in our community – causes that include rage and anger, apathy and denial, under-employment, mis-education, and racism. The rise of the “prison industrial complex” and the glamorization of gangster-like activity can also be included. The roots of this culture of violence, continuing to escalate in this community, may call for further debate. This document addresses the trauma of loss and pain felt by so many people as a result of this violence—trauma and stress that have caused untold damage to our collective psyche.

From our elders to people living with disabilities, to our young school children, to every individual in the community, including the victims and their families – everyone is vulnerable. It is damaging to the health of the community when the trauma of loss and pain continue to escalate. Boldly stated, we must work diligently to heal the trauma because we have a responsibility to the life, health and vitality of the community. We can no longer afford to let a few violent people, who seemingly operate under a law unto themselves and who are preying on their own communities continue to hold the rest of us hostage.

Today, we must look toward one another for answers not so easily explained. While moving forward we must look backward, inspired by our cherished brothers and sisters of the early Civil Rights Movements and the Black Power Movement, and seek guidance to continue this fight to heal and to save our community. There are many lessons they taught us about self-determination, building and uplifting the community and empowering entire generations to change. Sadly, today, not only are we still fighting our traditional enemies, we must also acknowledge the historical enemy that has always been with us, one that is getting stronger – and that is the enemy within.

Who are some of those enemies that threaten the lifeblood of the community? Many of them are our own youth, between the ages of 12 and 25, who are responsible for the shootings and killings we see almost nightly on the evening news. They are the people selling guns, even AK-47s, to our youth. They are the ones committing drive-by shootings and gangster-like executions in front of residents, and in public places. They are the drug dealers selling in and around schools, near senior citizen buildings, on street corners, and in business areas. Indeed, all areas of the community *must* be considered drug free zones. Furthermore, the youth are not the only people responsible for perpetuating this culture of violence. We know that many adults are also committing and supporting these violent acts against the community.

Today, we must honestly ask ourselves – why have we, the community, allowed the violence to escalate? Why does it appear that most of us sit by, wringing our hands in despair and lamenting, “*Somebody must do something before it’s too late!*” How long are we going to let the police do it, the government do it, the social service agencies do it, and the churches do it? How long will we continue to let this fear paralyze us to inaction? How long will we allow this fear to embolden the enemy to maintain its hold on us? What can we, the community, do for ourselves to end this “madness?”

We must seize the time to reclaim our community, now!

Therefore, *everyone* living and working in the community must accept the challenge to:

- **Become active!** Do not be afraid to take up the fight! We, the citizens who live, work, and worship in this community have a great responsibility. We must restore our own community to its original greatness. Too many of us are waiting for *someone else* to end our bondage of fear. We expect the police, our elected officials, or the leaders of organizations and agencies to clean up our streets for us. They cannot do it alone.
- **Encourage** the youth to lead this struggle for the life of our community, for it is their struggle as well. When the youth took up the struggle during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, they made great strides, as well as tremendous sacrifices for all of us. Because of their courage and commitment, the entire community was galvanized and empowered. Today, it is just as important for the new movement to come directly from the youth, who are most affected by the culture of violence pervading our communities.
- **Speak** boldly and forthrightly to your own family members who are committing destructive actions against the community. Do not accept their behavior or their money.
- **Join** with those courageous men and women who actually walk and talk with the “brothers and sisters” on the block. Come out to stand along side of those who are strongly visible at the scene of every shooting or act of violence. We serve notice that we will no longer hide. We will no longer tolerate this continued bondage of fear.
- **Proclaim** that responsible reporting is not “snitching.” It is our civic duty. Responsible reporting should not only address crime and violence in the community. It should also include a platform for addressing any issues that negatively affect the community and directly contribute to the demise and degradation of the community as a whole.
- **Create** a web of block watch programs that stay connected with one another in every neighborhood to enhance community engagement. Communities in Allegheny County and beyond could develop a working communication initiative such as a Community House reporting system, a vehicle through which each community directly can address any issues that confront a particular neighborhood. A community-appointed team would be responsible for deciphering, validating and forwarding information to the appropriate

parties. Such a system would empower neighborhood communities to take responsibility for their own issues, and serve as a trustworthy resource that would also support initiatives such as the City of Pittsburgh Citizen's Observer Reporting System. Furthermore, instituting such an initiative would bring pride back into the communities, and serve as a powerful "voice" for community self-reliance, accountability and empowerment.

- **Establish** an open relationship with the police to curb destructive behavior in each and every community. Furthermore, we must strengthen existing relationships between the community and the police.
- **Work** proactively to defuse conflicts occurring among and between families, neighborhoods, and gang members in the community. This is the source of much of the violence in the schools.
- **Provide** an outlet in each community for resolving conflicts *before* they escalate into violence, by creating community-based mediation offices staffed by community residents trained in conflict management and dispute resolution. Staff must have an understanding of, and utilize, ways of solving conflicts that are culturally relevant for the communities served. Furthermore, all community members must be encouraged to advocate for programs that protect victims of violent crimes, and support the notion of restorative justice for those who commit acts of violence.
- **Join**, be active and support existing organizations that are working for social justice, community empowerment, economic empowerment, and violence reduction. Every eligible citizen must make a lifetime commitment to vote in *each and every election* to create, and sustain, the *political will* to support such initiatives.
- **Build** bridges of understanding and cooperation as we collectively rid the community of the reckless violence that plagues us. There are many different institutions and organizations – street, grassroots, community-based, social service agencies, and communities of faith -- already doing the work of community-building. They are working diligently to bring a change in the community. No group is more or less valuable, competent, or viable than the next. Therefore, there must be greater solidarity among those groups and their leaders who are doing similar work. Everyone must take on the responsibility for working to end the culture of violence that is sucking dry the lifeblood of our community.
- **Serve** notice -- collectively, loudly, and visibly -- to those who continue to escalate this culture of violence. We will no longer silently stand by and accept these devastating and vicious acts committed by our youth or by anyone else who are the perpetrators of death and destruction.

It has been said that, "all this talk of peace and love will not change things." However, to work toward peace is a courageous act of love. To be empowered for change is the result of love. Breathing life and humanity back into the community is a true demonstration of love.

Therefore, *we the community*, proclaim we will no longer be hostages to those who prey on the community through this culture of violence. Because we love our community, we *will* come back outside. We *will* take back our streets – block by block, and by any means necessary!



THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

“Culture mandates that one make home the primary concern of the heart. The heart creates love, support, cooperation, nurturing, and peace. Home is our first school. Let us put our hearts, minds, bodies and souls back into the home as the first step toward eliminating the violence in the streets.” (Iyanla Vanzant in Acts of Faith: Daily Meditations for People of Color)

We must *heal* the community to end violence. **We MUST reclaim the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child.** More importantly, we must realize that it takes the *entire* village to help the family raise its children. This includes the schools, communities of faith, social institutions, and community allies. All aspects of the village must take responsibility for raising the children and supporting *all* families in our community.

Therefore, as the village we recognize the following:

- There are all kinds of families in the African American community – two-parent families, single mothers raising children, single fathers raising children, grandparents and other relatives raising children, and foster care families. The village must support families, no matter what the composition or the orientation. Families need the support of the entire community. Institutions of faith, schools, businesses, and social and educational institutions *must* help them raise children, and provide relevant programs to address the diverse needs of the family, as well as those of the community.
- We have lost an understanding of how the history, cultural values, beliefs, practices, and traditions have sustained and protected the African American family. We have forgotten the significance of the role played by our elders as keepers of wisdom, as teachers of cultural values, and as role models for parenting. Today’s youth feel abandoned and disrespected by the rest of the community. We must heal the distrust and the disconnection that seemingly comes from a breakdown of the strong sense of unity once shared by everyone in the village. We must return to and accept the practice of holding youth accountable whenever we encounter unacceptable or inappropriate behavior. Therefore, to have a healthy community, we must repair the relationship between the generations to help break the cycle of violence permeating our neighborhoods. Furthermore, we must make a commitment to reclaim and institute these values, practices and traditions to save today’s families.
- Parents must see themselves as the children’s first teachers and main role models. Children often learn more from what they see their parents do than from what their parents say. We learn about values and behaviors from our parents. Parents must understand that they have responsibilities as well as rights to raise their own children. They have the *right* to raise children in a safe, healthy, productive and positive environment. Yet, they must take the *responsibility* to empower their children to become responsible and productive adults. However, they cannot do this alone. The schools, communities of faith, social service agencies, and the community *must assist* families in achieving these goals.

If we truly want to have a healthy community with healthy families, we must recognize the family as the *foundation* of the village. Protected and insulated by the entire village, *parents and families* must make a commitment to:

- **Empower** children with a strong sense of self, community, culture, and spirituality to help them feel self-confident enough to avoid negative peer pressure and make the right choices. Remind our youth that the village will also take part in their individual rearing, and they should respect and listen to elders when approached regarding their appropriate *and* inappropriate behaviors.
- **Instill** children with a sense of responsibility to the family, to the neighborhood in which they live as well as to the wider community. Trust and respect helps to build a healthy family, *and* a healthy community.
- **Support** youth by allowing them to follow their dreams and not be deterred by influences of youth who engage in negative and even criminal lifestyles. Adults must encourage a *positive* mindset and perspective for all youth and must constantly be supportive of the need for young people to "do the right thing."
- **Encourage** youth to only take part in *legal* money-making opportunities. Parents must not allow their children to participate in illegal activities, even when those activities have the possibility of bringing additional income into the household. Parents and guardians must realize that such behaviors can lead to the imprisonment and/or death of their children.
- **Teach** children self-discipline by strongly urging them to resist engaging in unhealthy or illegal behaviors or life-styles. Help them to deal with negative peer pressure, especially with regards to drugs and alcohol.
- **Provide** positive role models. Children must see strong, positive men and women living, working and involved in the community. Fathers must take an active role in raising their children, whether they are in or out of the home. Men in the village must step in to "father" children when biological fathers are incarcerated, or dead, or otherwise absent. In doing so these men can provide the nurturing such children need to be emotionally and physically healthy. Moreover, the *entire* community must serve as extended family to provide support for *all* families in the village.
- **Demonstrate** at all times positive parenting skills and habits to provide a loving and caring environment for the youth under one's care. Parents and guardians should always keep open communications with their children and provide opportunities for young people to feel free to share their deepest fears, concerns, upsets and frustrations. Such an atmosphere of trust might prevent the child from resorting to negative and possibly criminal behaviors
- **Teach** children to be assertive, not aggressive, in expressing themselves. Help them to understand they can resolve conflicts without resorting to inappropriate or violent behavior when they are at home, at school, *and* out in the community. Insist that children show respect for each other and *everyone* they encounter in the community. Monitor your children's friends or acquaintances and encourage them to develop healthy ways of communication with their peers.
- **Encourage** youth to use mediation techniques when faced with conflict and emotionally devastating situations. Parents and guardians should continually discourage the use of knives, guns and other weapons by young people who might find themselves involved in human conflicts. Parents and adults, in general, should constantly demonstrate positive interpersonal behaviors and practices to the youth of our community.

- **Value** the pursuit of education and raise the standard of excellence as an essential requirement for success. The academic achievement gap between African American children and the so-called “dominant” culture is widening and many of our children are failing. We cannot afford to let our children continue to buy into the mistaken notion that

to be smart, is to be acting “white.” We must instill in our children that being an educated person has nothing to do with color. They should understand that education is a right we did not always have as a people, and that we must not forget the blood shed to give us this right. Education provides a path to being productive and successful citizens.

- **Urge** your children to aspire to succeed in school. Insist that our youth graduate from high school, and, if they desire, seek higher education such as college, technical or trade schools. Insist that the schools give *all* children the skills to compete fully in today’s society. Advocate for the resources necessary for providing a safe environment conducive to learning, and elicit the help of the village to make certain this happens.
- **Take** a strong interest in every aspect of a child’s education. Develop open relationships with teachers, principals and other school officials. Be proactive instead of reactive. Healthy and positive collaboration between the parents and the schools must occur in order for children to receive the best education possible.
- **Develop** and encourage a strong work ethic in children from an early age to prepare them to become productive adults. For example, children can be responsible for chores around the home. Parents can encourage teens to obtain after-school or summer employment. Requiring children to volunteer in their schools, their community and in faith-based institutions provides excellent opportunities to learn leadership and social skills, which facilitate the development of a strong work ethic.
- **Monitor** what teens and children see in the media (TV, movies, videos, games), as well as the music they listen to. We are exposing children as young as two years of age to a myriad of potentially damaging messages about gender roles, self-gratification, and the acceptability of violence.
- **Talk** openly about subjects such as healthy relationships and healthy sexuality with children from an early age, and *before* they become adolescents. As a child’s primary and most important teachers, parents are encouraged to address issues such as sexual and social responsibility before their children become adolescents. Urge both boys and girls to value their virginity. Young men must understand that their manhood and masculinity are not solely defined by their ability to make children. Just as important, teen girls should not solely be defined by their sexuality. Encourage youth to seek positive and healthy friendships before they decide to engage in sexual activity. While marriage is the ideal, parents must strongly encourage youth to wait until they have completed their education or have become financially and emotionally stable to have families of their own. Parents can help their children safely navigate today’s society by having positive, committed, and safe relationships.
- **Gather** information about the importance of good mental, physical and emotional health, and consider adopting a healthy lifestyle, which includes proper nutrition and physical exercise for the entire family. Encourage the village to provide the necessary resources that contribute to a healthy community for all families.

- **Recognize** the *necessity* of securing all firearms, *if they are in the home*, to reduce the risk of accidents, theft, or unauthorized use. Just as so much of the violence in the streets is the result of using firearms, deaths or injuries in the home are also committed
- with guns. Therefore, parents who choose to keep firearms in the home must insure that children and visitors do not have access to them. Moreover, they must provide age-appropriate safety instruction for all members of the family.
- **Advocate** for safer communities. We must hold *every* school, municipality, and state and federally elected official accountable. Urge them to enact legislation that will protect the community and provide *all* of the resources necessary to make our communities safe for *everyone, including families*.

It indeed takes an *entire* village to raise a child. If *our* village does not, many more children and youth may seek another kind of *family* – a family that is fostered in violence – one that is called, “The Streets.” Therefore, the village *must* provide the guidance, and the leadership, as well as have the *will*, to raise all of our children in a productive, viable *and* safe environment.



The following sections comprise anti-violence strategies which can be implemented by the various segments of our society. Once again, we ask that you *act* on those strategies for which you have a commitment.



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Athletes

Historically athletes have been in a unique position to influence society. They have the responsibility of being good role models. Youth continue to look up to athletes at all levels – high school, college and professional – and they will mimic or imitate what they see them do, whether their behavior is positive or negative. Therefore athletes should:

:

- **Speak** articulately without using profanity.
- **Dress** appropriately for all occasions.
- **Act** politely and treat everyone they encounter with respect.
- **Utilize** their unique position to reach out and share positive messages with minority communities and beyond.
- **Complete** their own education and encourage others to do the same. Persons with high school diplomas and/or college degrees are less likely to be involved with anti-social or illegal behavior. Athletes should, therefore, use the discipline learned within their chosen sport, off the field, in their daily lives and in the community.
- **Take** responsibility for being aware of, and sensitive to, the issues in the community in which they are employed and live in during the season and perhaps off-season as well.
- **Participate** in community events when invited to do so and develop responsible connections to the community. Use the concept of team spirit to mobilize the community. It takes the efforts of *everyone*, including athletes, to heal the community. Team spirit, therefore, becomes community spirit.
- **Demonstrate** and share that athletes have to deal with the same kinds of issues and problems faced by many other people.

Professional Athletes

Professional Athletes are in a unique position to gain access to people in power at a level not available to the average citizen. In addition to the above stated responsibilities, professional athletes have an extremely powerful opportunity to impact the violence in the communities where they play. Therefore professional athletes should:

- **Support**, organizations that provide needed services for children living within the various communities with their time, talents and treasures.
- **Freely** donate their time for occasions throughout the year in the various communities to show their partnership with the cities from which they gain their livelihood. Such participation could enhance the financial success of many community events.

- **Consider** forming their own foundations; holding major annual fundraising events to benefit charities of their own choosing; providing funds and other resources for smaller events such as school and/or community events; repairing recreational facilities; building new facilities, such as community or wellness centers; providing recreational equipment, uniforms, books for libraries; and so on. Professional athletes could also provide scholarships for youth or others from disadvantaged communities.
- **Partner** with the business and corporate community in carrying out the action points identified in the Coalition Against Violence 2008 anti-violence document and support the anti-violence initiatives of other organizations and agencies.



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Black Business Community

All sectors of the community are urged to support African American business and business development throughout the region. The goal should include the development, implementation and maintenance of community-based businesses and employment initiatives that will create and establish viable businesses and living wage career and employment opportunities in and around designated African American communities. This should include the establishment of Community Business Development Centers, community commercial corridors and industrial parks. Such support will result in stronger and more viable businesses, thereby leading to additional employment opportunities for both adults and youth and giving them a viable alternative to violence.

Individual Community Members should:

- **Develop** the knowledge and skills to maximize their potential for becoming financially independent through continued learning and career exploration. Financial security and the creation of wealth strengthen the economic community and generate jobs and new career opportunities.
- **Support** businesses in their particular neighborhoods, as business is important to the viability of any community.
- **Respect** the rights of businesses to exist by not loitering in front of them or engaging in suspicious or illegal activities. Individuals should act in a manner that encourages the community to support businesses, including helping to create a family friendly atmosphere.
- **Report** to community policing organizations and/or law enforcement illegal or suspicious activities around stores and other community businesses.
- **Realize** that the implementation of the above stated goals will lead to a more viable and healthy atmosphere in which African American businesses can flourish.

The Black Business Community should:

- **Develop** a coordinated Community Business Development Network within the African American communities most impacted by violence.
- **Create** a Resident Employment Database initiative that identifies community residents and their talents, abilities and capabilities. Such a database would serve as a source of prospective employees for participating businesses. Voluntary support for, and contribution to, the database will increase the success of this initiative.
- **Seek** to employ the employable, and encourage and train community residents who have been deemed “unemployable.” Access the resident employment database for potential employees.

- **Create** and develop African American businesses that have the capacity to hire full-time workers and provide career training and benefit packages for their employees.
- **Utilize** youth workforce initiatives sponsored by agencies, schools, community and/or faith-based organizations that provide education, training, internships, apprenticeships, and/or employment. Continued support of these initiatives could also increase the reintegration of youth, who have been expelled, who have dropped out or who have graduated from school without basic skills.
- **Build** and strengthen the relationships between businesses and community youth by providing mentoring, training, and employment.
- **Provide** partnering and mentoring opportunities for existing and emerging businesses owned by African Americans and other people of color. Existing successful businesses can provide these opportunities.
- **Encourage** current, new and emerging African American businesses to avail themselves of the opportunities offered by professional business organizations such as the African American Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Minority and Women Business Enterprise community and any other such entities.
- **Encourage** established business organizations, such as the African American Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Minority And Women Business Enterprise community, to aggressively pursue working relationships with current, new, and emerging businesses in the African American community. Encourage such organizations to be accountable to the communities they serve.
- **Advertise** job openings and other opportunities in media used by the Black community.
- **Establish** training for every employee to nurture professionalism and professional behavior within their business surroundings. The establishment and enforcement of such professional behavior will lead to the creation of successful black businesses that will attract not only the African American community, but other communities as well.

Local Government and Foundations should:

- **Fund** programs providing business education, leadership training and work experience directed toward area student populations.
- **Provide** opportunities for African Americans and other people of color who wish to start their own businesses including start-up information, business plan development, and funding.
- **Demand** accountability for funds distributed to new and existing grant recipients, including reports of services provided and results, including job placements and the financial success of business ventures.
- **Develop** policies and legislation that will maintain communities and prevent disenfranchisement of voting blocs, thereby strengthening the participation of African American communities to reduce the level of frustration that leads to violence.

- **Provide** safety support systems that will allow African American businesses to operate successfully in an atmosphere of peace and security.
- **Encourage** and strengthen youth workforce initiatives to allow increased placement of youth with African American owned businesses. Such support will allow Black businesses to expand and become more productive.

Educational Institutions should:

- **Provide** more opportunities for middle and high school students to learn about the business world through both classroom learning and structured work experiences. Such support will improve their economic opportunities and give them a viable alternative to violence.
- **Continue** the institutional role in economic development by addressing the region's professional and support workforce needs through the continual development of new and expanded curriculum and training programs targeted to needed skill sets. Provide technical assistance to businesses, facilitating entrepreneurial training and creating new companies through technology transfer.



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The Business and Corporate Community

The Business and Corporate community has a strong interest in improving the quality of life for everyone in the region. High crime rates, inadequate educational and health care systems negatively affect the corporate community’s ability to attract and retain talent. Business leaders have a responsibility to impact the violence by providing leadership and creating economic opportunities that will improve the conditions for those historically disadvantaged. Therefore, local businesses and corporations are encouraged to support positive change in these communities by taking any or all of the following steps:

- **Recognize** the value of mentoring and providing positive role models by recruiting corporate employees and leaders to develop and participate in mentoring programs for schools, agencies and community-based organizations.
- **Aggressively** seek, recruit, and retain African American and other minority applicants for all corporate levels with special emphasis on hiring individuals from the metropolitan region.
- **Encourage** African American and other minority employees to develop new skills that will prepare them for promotional opportunities. Identify minority employees who show potential for career advancement and provide greater exposure to opportunities for accelerating their growth. Develop and provide support systems that foster success, such as internal mentoring programs that partner successful employees with newly hired African American employees.
- **Utilize** more African American and minority employees to facilitate outreach efforts in the minority communities. This will provide positive exposure for the company *and* the employees, and provide positive role models for African American youth.
- **Recruit** more African American and other minority managers and executives to serve on corporate boards. Encourage more executives, managers and other staff to volunteer for activities that support educational and violence prevention efforts, including sitting on boards of community-based organizations and agencies. Offer such opportunities to all staff, not just to persons of color.
- **Adopt** a school or school district in areas serving the economically disadvantaged. Assist teachers and counselors by providing mentors and/or classroom visitors who can expose students to career opportunities, as well as real life experiences. Establish reward programs that recognize students and teachers who demonstrate leadership and achievement for their work in the community and in the schools.
- **Invite** teachers, school administrators, and community members to be training partners in corporate diversity training programs.
- **Provide** leadership and skills development programs and seminars to community leaders by utilizing corporate internal training staff and/or encouraging their training vendors to volunteer their services.
- **Offer** scholarships, internships and apprenticeships as well as career exploration opportunities to economically disadvantaged students.

- **Publicize** and promote the outreach programs currently being offered so that they can serve as models for other organizations.
- **Provide** business opportunities for minority owned businesses. Research has confirmed that as minority businesses grow they are more likely to hire minorities thereby providing economic development in their communities.
- **Educate** and communicate with neighborhood citizens and community groups on the benefits of supporting African American businesses and business development.
- **Make** a commitment to accept youth into training programs, summer employment (full-time as well as part-time). Develop and provide youth employment, mentoring, and apprenticeship programs for youth throughout the year.
- **Financially** support schools that serve economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and fund neighborhood public libraries so they can provide more and diverse resources.

The Role of the Business and Corporate Community in Restorative and Rehabilitative Justice:

The corporate community is in a unique position to affect the future of the high number of African Americans and Hispanics who have been incarcerated in Allegheny County and throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Crimes of the past must not dictate the future. In this regard, such individuals must be given a chance to start their lives anew which can impact significantly the recidivism rate in this region.

Therefore, the business and Corporate Communities should:

- **Train**, hire and provide long-term employment for persons who have served time. Local, county and state governments are strongly encouraged to provide incentives to corporations which hire such persons.
- **Lobby** the political structure and law enforcement to change the restrictive laws that currently inhibit employment, training, and educational opportunities for individuals with criminal histories.
- **Lobby** for laws that allow the records of non-violent criminals, including drug users, to be expunged, either after completion of some requirements or after a short time period following release (one to two years).
- **Create** an atmosphere of accepting those who are reentering society and who need to feel a sense of welcome and self worth. African American and minority-owned businesses in particular must take the lead.
- **Support** and sponsor organizations that can, and do, hire persons who have served time.
- **Provide** training and skills development programs to those with a history of incarceration.



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Civic Engagement: The Role of the Citizen

Civic participation is the foundation of Democracy. True democracy *is* government *by* the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. Civic education helps prepare people, especially the young, to carry out their roles as citizens and to help them understand that one’s vote *does* matter. Civic education, therefore, is political education which cultivates the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation. Therefore, to give all citizens the necessary tools to fully participate in the democratic process and to politically impact violence, we should challenge and hold accountable all elected officials, governmental bodies, and encourage social service agencies, schools, community groups *and* the family to do the following:

- **Create** an enlightened community through institutions that educate, motivate, organize, and mobilize citizens in the African American community to encourage *full participation* in a barrier-free democratic process.
- **Encourage** all citizens to participate in the struggle to eliminate barriers to civic participation that will in turn promote greater social and economic justice to enhance the quality of life for all residents.
- **Develop** educational programs, leadership training and coalitions that will strengthen and empower our communities to make voting and civic participation a cultural responsibility and tradition.
- **Institute** and expand curriculum at all grade levels to include lessons about democracy that include such topics as fundamentals of constitutional government, civil and human rights and equality before the law, free and fair elections, due process of law – which should be, and are, the pillars of democracy. Teach young people the true meaning of a *fully* democratic society.
- **Provide** formal and informal opportunities for discussion and action around civic and democratic education. Provide venues for civic engagement in schools, libraries, workplaces, civic organizations, unions, communities of faith, during campaigns and elections and through the mass media.
- **Join**, be active and support organizations that are working for social justice, community empowerment, economic empowerment and violence reduction.
- **Exercise** one’s right to express one’s political voice *at any time* by contacting elected officials, contacting the print and broadcast media, writing petitions and participating in other forms of active engagement to hold accountable elected officials *at all levels* of government, from the local up to the federal.

- **Make** a lifetime commitment to vote in *each and every* election to exercise one's rights as a citizen of this society. Be a willing participant at every level of the political process. Practice and also teach children, from an early age, to practice democratic values such as mutual respect, freedom of thought, commitment to diversity and social justice.

The culture of civic participation must be brought back to a vibrant and relevant lifestyle if we are to be successful in our efforts to stop the increasing violence in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, cities and the region.



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Communities of Faith

Recognizing and valuing of the sacred breath within each human being is essential to building relationships that ultimately can reduce violence and increase respect and tolerance for oneself and others. Indeed, practicing spiritual disciplines can help people understand the meaning of the suffering and frustrations of others, channel their anger constructively, and reduce violence. Faith communities have an extremely important role to play in the transformation of communities and are, therefore, asked to do the following:

- **Seek** to reach youth and build their spirituality.
- **Institute** a “youth outreach day” in which communities of faith open their facilities, at least once a month, to encourage their members to meet and interact with youth.
- **Interact** with youth rather than preach “at” them.
- **Establish** safe-havens for youth and families to discuss issues and receive Afro-centric treatment for the reduction of causes that can lead to violence. This effort should include the establishment of study centers that would supplement the educational system, with topics such as African American history and civic leadership. With special emphasis on the African American community and its experiences, such centers also should encourage the creation of multicultural non-sectarian youth group activities.
- **Provide** support and facilities for youth with the goal of keeping youth in school and helping them achieve higher educational success.
- **Open** and expand facilities to the community. Support the establishment of safe zone initiatives. Actively communicate the availability of programs for families and youth in the community.
- **Advocate** for youth and families at all levels of government for legislation, regulations and programs, which promote the health of the community.
- **Collaborate** with street level workers, youth, and schools to teach and practice peace and conflict resolution across geographic areas and faith groups
- **Partner** with schools to conduct/teach anger management, mediation, conflict resolution, negotiation skills and for community rebuilding initiatives.
- **Organize** actions at government facilities to petition and pressure our elected officials to be more responsive to community concerns, needs, and aspirations. Where possible communities of faith should partner with community-based organizations and agencies which have initiated positive actions that impact the community.
- **Seek** assistance from foundations and local and national faith organizations to obtain consulting services and leadership training to address violence in the community.

- **Initiate** forums and trainings within the religious community related to violence prevention and intervention that can be shared with and implemented within the community.
- **Provide** classes to prepare young people for marriage and family.
- **Nurture** non-violent communications as a means of self respect and respect for others both in public and private forums. This model of non-violent communication breaks the hostile pattern of irrational and hostile responses which lead to self violence and violence against others.
- **Restore** the rich tradition of African American spirituality and faith as a strong foundation for promoting values that reestablishes the dignity of people, reconstructs relationships, and reinstate mutual respect, trust, compassion and justice.
- **Reclaim** the spirit and culture of making communities of faith welcoming to *all* people and provide opportunities, through dialogue, prayer and service to eradicate the barriers that keep people and neighborhoods divided, Communities of faith can offer a safe haven for people impacted by the violence in our communities.



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Education: Primary and Secondary

Education is the foundation for financial success and responsible citizenship. Historically, the lack of education has led to the absence of hope, wasted lives, violence, incarceration, and even death. The entire educational system, from pre-school to university, must be held accountable to the community. It must empower students to live creative, effective and contributing lives. We therefore challenge the education community from Kindergarten through Grade 12 to do the following:

- **Increase** efforts to assure African American students achieve educational success within all learning environments at *all* levels.
- **Increase** family participation and support for school districts’ Student Assistance Programs (S.A.P.). Families should be encouraged to have input into the school’s efforts to maintain S.A.P. funds.
- **Be accountable** for educating all students. Work with community advisory boards and student advisory boards to identify unsound educational practices and develop curriculum changes that will improve outcomes for African American children.
- **Commit** to develop and implement an expanded black history curriculum that establishes links to the past and that makes connections with the present, regardless of the racial mix in the school. Ensure that this curriculum will be taught throughout the year, not just during Black History Month. Make an ongoing commitment to include information that reflects the life achievements and struggles of people of color, both past and present, who can serve as positive role models for all youth. Provide appropriate library resources to support the curriculum.
- **Incorporate** classes that teach the values, cultural principles and belief systems of African, African American and other cultures. Utilize them as a tool to empower students, their families and the community to heal from the violence that prevails today. Investigate local, national, and international approaches.
- **Institute** and expand curriculum at all grade levels to include lessons about democracy that include such topics as fundamentals of constitutional government, civil and human rights and equality before the law, free and fair elections, due process of law – which should be, and are, the pillars of democracy. Teach young people the true meaning of a *fully* democratic society.
- **Review** current textbooks and resources, replacing them with those that provide a multicultural approach, and develop a curriculum that addresses the needs of African American students.
- **Include** courses that assist the student in becoming competent with technology. It is not enough to “teach to the test” in order to meet minimum educational requirements.

- **Require** students to participate in community service opportunities as a requisite to high school graduation. Service provides opportunities to learn important life skills and explore potential career options.
- **Require** guidance counselors to provide individualized career counseling and track the student's progress toward meeting educational goals.
- **Require** parents, administrators, guidance counselors and teachers to review the student's progress toward meeting educational goals on a monthly basis.
- **Ensure** that community-based organizations have a thorough knowledge of graduation requirements so that they can offer an action plan to parents and students for completing graduation requirements from high school. This resource should be available in the community for all school age youth to assist them in furthering their post high school education.
- **Provide** information regarding financial assistance for students wishing to obtain further education and training after high school.
- **Encourage** students planning to attend college after graduation to take college courses while still in high school. These courses should be affordable and scholarship discounts should be offered to students with strong grade point averages (GPA).
- **Hire** school principals and other administrators who set high achievement standards for their staff and for the students who exhibit abilities to inspire -- not just those who technically meet the bottom-line requirements.
- **Hire** more teachers throughout all grade levels, who reflect the diverse cultures and races of the community, particularly, more African American male teachers. Increase the number of people of color in managerial and administrative positions.
- **Encourage** teacher's unions to do more to recruit and provide a supportive work environment for African American teachers.
- **Provide** effective cultural sensitivity training to all teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff.
- **Open** school buildings for community use during non-school hours.
- **Advocate** for meaningful parental, family, and caregiver involvement by providing opportunities for *everyone* to get involved, including working parents and caregivers. Implement programming to encourage parents to support parent/ teacher/student organizations.
- **Encourage** more organizations and agencies to sponsor mentoring programs and provide in-school facilities for them. Expand existing in-school programs that successfully serve youth.
- **Invite** social service providers, including mental health professionals, to speak to teachers, parents and the community on various issues that have an impact on students' learning and development.

- **Ensure** that all school activities, including career days, talent shows, and clubs, reflect the diversity of the community.
- **Provide** separate meeting space for speak-out sessions, lectures and assemblies related to issues addressed by the Coalition Against Violence in this document
- **Be** more responsive to community outcries concerning expelling and suspending African American children for trivial and unnecessary reasons. Examine the negative effect oppressive school policies have on student morale and mental well-being. Such oppressive policies undermine learning and provide opportunities for other negative behaviors.
- **Examine** the fairness and effectiveness of the suspension/expulsion policy. Discipline measures should be corrective, yet supportive, to help students without having to disrupt their education.
- **Advocate** for redefining discipline as a movement away from interpreting misbehaviors or wrongdoings as acts of defiance or opposition to authority. Disruptive behavior may simply be a declaration of frustration, rather than defiance to the school system.
- **Decrease** punishment inequities across race, gender and socio-economic lines. Practice more sincere and effective ways to decrease suspension or expulsion rates which disproportionately affect African American students.
- **Increase** utilization of diverse cultural-values models, which can be incorporated with the current school's discipline processes. Provide training and/or additional training for teachers on how to handle disruptive students. Also, incorporate social-emotional learning programs that teach students how to manage their own emotions and behaviors throughout their school experience.
- **Make** better effort to inform and educate students and families about the school system's expectations for acceptable behavior. Provide public awareness announcements in area newspapers and other media, or post policies on school websites.
- **Provide** parents and the community with information about appropriate corrective services (whether school- or court-ordered) that are not punitive. Such service must be meaningful and relevant for the purpose of challenging students to understand their responsibility to school and to society.
- **Reexamine** the truancy policies currently in place with regards to African American girls and boys. Give parents assistance in keeping students in school through more effective case management to decrease truancy.
- **Utilize** families, concerned community members, and business owners to assist in identifying students who are not in school.
- **Ensure** that school staff persons make every effort to contact parents and caregivers when students have been designated absent by the beginning of classes, for the protection of all students.
- **Require** parents and other caregivers, in the interest of children's safety, to provide the schools with working phone numbers.

- **Make** schools and areas surrounding schools safe zones, specifically with regard to drugs, gangs, and violence. This may include enforcing existing policies around these issues, and/or creating new ones.
- **Identify** and implement age and grade appropriate methodologies that address issues of drugs and alcohol and their impact on education, as well as violence in the community.
- **Utilize** peer education programs to address drug and alcohol abuse and factors which can lead to violent behavior.
- **Welcome** parent-community-teacher involvement in improving employment prospects and developing training programs.
- **Disseminate** resource lists that offer youth information about career paths, existing youth employment programs, apprenticeship programs, and training.
- **Provide** information to parents and caregivers so they know what counseling and training programs are available to their families



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Education: Colleges and Universities

Universities and colleges need to take advantage of the opportunities related to the multicultural diversity of its students by including courses that reflect that diversity. Colleges and universities should be at the forefront of this movement because of their unique position to educate young people from *all* backgrounds. Responsibility for the implementation of this initiative must come from the top. Therefore colleges and universities should:

- **Develop** early admissions projects that identify students in their junior year of high school, and encourage them to take introductory or remedial courses that lead to guaranteed admission to a college or university.
- **Develop** mentoring programs that pair inner-city youth with faculty and administrative staff who will mentor the youth, at least through the crucial first year of college. The mentors must help the students realize that they too have value.
- **Provide** summer programs that allow youth the opportunity to visit a college so that they become familiar with college life. Require content in freshman level core courses that gives students an understanding of the nature of violence in America, and their ability to impact necessary and positive change.
- **Collaborate** with high schools to develop and expand courses for students to complete college courses while still in high school, or to accelerate completion of education that leads to a career.
- **Provide** and expand scholarship programs for needy students.
- **Develop** and implement programming aimed at strengthening academically challenged students in order to increase their level of success and rate of graduation.
- **Provide** additional support for such students to help raise literacy, increase comprehension, and develop critical thinking skills, all of which are important for academic success.
- **Support** student organizations that provide mentoring, tutoring, and other services designed to increase the academic achievement of at-risk youth.
- **Require** academic experiences including courses that cultivate awareness and respect for people of diverse cultures. Make certain that the contributions of African Americans and other people of color are included throughout the curricula offered in colleges and universities. Require that all students take a comparative history course that includes the contributions of people of color.
- **Establish** and/or expand consortiums of local college and university departments and schools of social work, mental health, minority health, psychology, child care, drug and alcohol, child development, child and family studies to provide experts to counsel, mentor and provide recovery programs for individual and family victims of violence.

- **Increase** the number of internships and co-op education placements for college students with community organizations and church social action programs that provide services to victims of violence.
- **Provide** scholarships for heads of households and children of those families who have a history of committing or being victims of violence to break generational cycles.
- **Sponsor** after school programs and conduct summer camps/retreats for children who have been victims of violence or who come from families experiencing violence. Discuss topics such as how to handle grief, how *not* to be a victim, and how to resolve conflict.
- **Conduct** parent workshops on topics such as the grieving process; how not to transmit violence to their children; and the recognition of the potentials for violence for parents who have either been victims of violence or who themselves have lost children to violence.
- **Provide** free access to college and university plays, concerts, sports events and to facilities with basketball, tennis courts and swimming pools for members of the community who have experienced violence
- **Expand** opportunities for college instruction to those presently incarcerated for committing acts of violence and provide pathways for degrees and employment upon their release to create new life opportunities.
- **Build** relationships with communities by developing collaborative efforts and leadership programs; by establishing service learning programs that provide students and faculty the opportunity to build meaningful community relationships; and by providing learning opportunities in local neighborhoods for problem solving, personal growth and leadership development.
- **Utilize** and strengthen resources for higher education institutions to provide periodic forums for government and community leaders to engage in open and candid discussion about the findings of any research that impact communities plagued by violence. Target outcomes would be the development of specific community action plans with identified strategies, tactics, and goals.
- **Utilize** peer mentoring and professional support to address abuse of alcohol and other drugs.
- **Continue** the institutional role in economic development by addressing the region's workforce needs through the development of new curriculum and training programs targeted to needed skills; by providing technical assistance to businesses; by facilitating entrepreneurial training; and by creating new companies through technology transfer.
- **Actively solicit** significant participation by MBE/WBE (Minority and Women's Business Enterprises) for both construction and goods and services contractual opportunities. Effective monitoring policies and procedures must be in place to guarantee implementation. Universities and colleges should be vigilant in their efforts to ensure that African American men are included in the process.



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Foundations/Charitable Trusts

Foundations have an important role to play in reducing violence because of their ability to foster initiatives which are holistic, comprehensive, systematic, evidence-based *and* empowering. They can recommend resources and guide the process when it comes to determining solutions for ending the violence plaguing our communities. Furthermore, foundations can play an important role by making innovative and non-traditional grants that may have a profound impact within the African American community. Therefore, foundations and charitable trusts are strongly encouraged to do the following:

- **Convene** a community collaboration that would generate a detailed, strategic and tactical plan to address the issue of violence; one that would engage and empower a wide spectrum of concerned citizens, organizations, and community leaders to reach those who are impacted by violence. Support key elements of the plan once it is in place.
- **Fund** this strategic and tactical planning exercise, which might include finding model programs implemented across the country. Make site visits to neighborhood organizations that are currently implementing solutions to assess program success.
- **Fund** service organizations that develop and offer needed services identified through this planning process, including currently unfunded and under-funded services. Redefine the criteria for their success rate to reflect more than the “numbers.”
- **Place** members of the community with life experience relevant to the issue of violence on their boards, key commissions, and committees.
- **Provide** funding for youth employment, training, and apprenticeship programs.
- **Embrace** youth violence and youth education as major initiatives. Identify and fund effective programs that provide solutions.
- **Monitor** donations made to the community to determine effectiveness and real needs, in order to justify future funding. The evaluation process must include reports from the people who are the recipients of the services provided by the funding source. Each foundation and charitable trust should identify a process by which those served by such programs can have an opportunity to assess such programming.
- **Fund** grass roots organizing efforts, community centers, and neighborhood revitalization programs.
- **Develop** programs and give funding to street workers and community outreach programs so they can implement the agendas above.
- **Report** investments in the African American community annually to the wider community. Publicize a list of the organizations that have applied for and have received foundation monies.



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Government

The purpose of government is to engage in activities to promote the “common good,” and to regulate and control social, political and economic spheres. Government entities must collaborate with local communities, businesses, and the philanthropic communities to impact violence. To alleviate the root causes of violence, and not merely control the violence, governmental entities should do the following:

- **Fund**, monitor and evaluate programs that meet the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of children, youth, families and adults in the community. These needs affect the human spirit, i.e. acceptance, belonging to community, positive social grouping, as well as affirmation of the self *and* the community
- **Support** “real” programs that emphasize keeping families safely together.
- **Pass**, implement, and enforce regulations and legislation that protect the civil rights of *all* people. Be open to participate in evaluations of program effectiveness to ensure that such programs meet the needs of affected individuals.
- **Create** and/or expand opportunities for input from youth, families and adults regarding policies aimed at reducing violence.
- **Produce** a political report card to assess accountability to responsibilities and campaign promises involving the reduction of violence. This report should be presented to the public periodically, preferably quarterly.
- **Provide** incentives, including tax incentives, for businesses participating in the economic revitalization of blighted areas; providing training/apprenticeship programs; creating employee wellness plans and programs; and developing employer sponsored childcare.
- **Commit** finances and provide sufficient staff for expanded and comprehensive youth employment and apprentice programs.
- **Provide** community education forums about political and governmental processes.
- **Fund** programs for those transitioning from the criminal justice system.
- **Fund** and support mentoring programs, particularly those which recruit more persons of color.
- **Fund** and promote entities which can provide wide publicity for positive examples of African American images and role models.
- **Legislate**, regulate, and provide funding for culturally relevant best practices that ensure a quality education for *all* children, especially African Americans, to prepare them to live in a global community.

- **Fund** educational programs from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 that ensure that students can function well in cultural, recreational, and social contexts.
- **Support** research initiatives that identify best practices in violence prevention. Give priority support to programs that integrate the best practices in violence prevention.
- **Ensure** that *all* people have access to comprehensive illness prevention and treatment health services regardless of financial status.
- **Form** partnerships with communities that include health care centers and health care clients to ensure that the physical, social, and emotional needs of everyone are being met in a culturally sensitive manner.
- **Fund** programs for early childhood stimulation to assist children in reaching developmental milestones.
- **Provide** wellness centers that include recreation *and* education.
- **Provide** health insurance coverage for both mental *and* physical health care services.



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Gun Violence Reduction

A civil society is based on citizens and lawful authorities working cooperatively to reduce the violence in our neighborhoods. The irresponsible use of guns, especially handguns, is to blame for a great percentage of the violence and killing that occur in our neighborhoods. In addition, guns are frequently involved in accidental injuries. The following actions will help to reduce the prevalence of gun related accidental injuries and violence:

Role of Families in Gun Safety:

- **Provide** age appropriate gun safety instruction to all members of the household. Emphasize that guns should be pointed only in a safe direction, that the trigger should not be touched, and confirm that it is not loaded. Teach respect for the destructive potential of guns.
- **Secure** all firearms in the home to reduce the risk of accidents, theft, or unauthorized use. Keep guns and ammunition locked away in separate locations when not in use. Store guns unloaded and use a gunlock. Any defensive gun kept to protect a family must be stored unloaded and secured with a gun lock against unauthorized or unlawful use. Do not allow children or visitors to have unsupervised access to guns stored in the family home. Plan carefully to avoid a tragedy.
- **Discuss** the difference between real gun violence and the glorified violence in video games and movies with children and other household members. Be a good role model about gun safety and responsible behavior.
- **Support** community and legislative efforts to reduce the presence of guns and the levels of gun violence in our neighborhoods. Contact elected officials in person, write letters, send emails, sign petitions, and attend community events to voice one's opinions. Vote for candidates who support efforts to stop irresponsible gun ownership to make our neighborhoods safer from gun violence.

Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice System:

- **Investigate** thoroughly all gun-related incidents including reports of people brandishing guns and complaints of shots fired. This action should be applied in a fair and uniform fashion throughout all neighborhoods.
- **Prosecute** all gun-related crimes and seek maximum sentencing when guns are used in the commission of illegal activities.
- **Track** the source of guns, including assault weapons, used in crimes and prosecute the criminals who illegally manufacture, distribute, and/or sell these weapons. Gunsmiths who illegally modify firearms should also be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Legislative Bodies:

- **Pass** laws to reduce the unchecked flow of handguns into our communities including reasonable limits on the number of guns that can be purchased within a specified timeframe, requirements for reporting lost or stolen guns, and laws regarding the safe storage of guns and ammunition. Pass state and national laws, and provide funds for enforcement efforts, which restrict access to high capacity, paramilitary weapons.
- **Strengthen** the systems and enforce the laws used to identify persons who are not legally authorized to purchase guns. Ensure that individuals who have lost the right to possess guns are entered into the national computerized system. Ban all gun sales or transfers that do not involve a background check through this system.
- **Redirect** a portion of the excise tax collected on gun and ammunition sales toward gun safety education programs targeting urban populations. Use these monies to fund advertising campaigns addressing responsible gun ownership and gun security initiatives.



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The Health Care System

The healthcare system has a unique and important role in reducing the physical, emotional, and social problems that contribute to violence in our communities. This role goes beyond providing direct care services. It includes responsibilities related to partnership with communities and health care clients to provide health-related education and employment opportunities. Members of the health care system are called upon to take the following actions to heal the wounds caused by violence and reduce the violence in our communities.

Individual Health Care Providers

- **Attend** to the entire person in a culturally sensitive manner. Ensure that clinical evaluations address the physical, psychological, and social factors that cause or result from violence.
- **Develop** a treatment plan collaboratively with the client, family supports, and other health care providers that take into account the client's unique needs, values, and resources.
- **Identify** and develop relationships with community service providers in order to refer victims of violence to appropriate community resources.
- **Partner** with community stakeholders to identify the social services that would be beneficial for addressing the root causes of violence in the community. Advocate for resources to provide these needed services and participate in efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions.
- **Provide** confidential and culturally sensitive screening for alcohol and/or substance abuse. Screen for signs of emotional abuse or violence during all episodes of care.

Health Care Oriented Businesses:

- **Display** public service information in waiting areas regarding community agencies providing services to reduce violence including help-lines, shelters, and emergency services. Provide business cards or other pocket sized items with local agency contact information.
- **Develop** tracking systems to evaluate the adequacy of mental health and violence screening programs and the effectiveness of referrals. Seek feedback from clients regarding satisfaction with the care system and suggestions for improvements.
- **Support** efforts to provide access to comprehensive health care regardless of the individual's insurance coverage or ability to pay.
- **Partner** with community members to identify services desired by community members and to design culturally sensitive programs to address community needs.

- **Hire** health care professionals and support personnel that reflect the diversity of client populations.

Health Insurance Organizations and Agencies:

- **Provide** the same level of coverage for mental and physical health care services.
- **Fund** mental health case management services to increase continuity of care and reduce non-compliance with the treatment plan.
- **Consult** with representatives of the communities impacted by violence when identifying service priorities and developing new services.

Government and Foundations

- **Provide** comprehensive mental health and social services to people transitioning from prison or institutional settings.
- **Locate** publicly funded mental health and wellness care services in the communities most impacted by violence.
- **Support** efforts to achieve universal access to comprehensive health care.

Health Care Educational Institutions

- **Increase** amount of needs-based financial assistance to people of color in order to achieve greater diversity in the health care professions and increase the number of culturally diverse role models.
- **Partner** with community health care/wellness providers to identify local needs for violence reduction education programs. Provide continuing education programs directed toward health care professionals as well as programs designed for the lay public.
- **Develop** relationships with health care providers and social service agencies in the communities impacted by violence in order to provide diverse opportunities for student clinical education and service learning activities.
- **Support** research focused on violence and the conditions that contribute to high levels of violence in the local community.
- **Encourage** faculty providing clinical services to individuals impacted by violence to partner with existing local community agencies and organizations to bring needed services into the communities affected by violence.



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The Juvenile Justice System

The Juvenile Justice System interfaces with youth when they violate the laws of local municipalities, states, or the federal government. Youth enter the system for a variety of behavioral reasons, which may include some type of abuse or social pressure. Therefore, to greatly reduce the numbers of youth impacted by this system, juvenile justice officials should do the following:

- **Collaborate** with parent and families, communities, and schools in preventing youth from entering/re-entering the Juvenile Justice System. This collaboration should include working with health, human services organizations, churches, businesses, law enforcement and educational institutions.
- **Work** with above-mentioned organizations to insure early intervention, in-home intervention, and alternatives to detention/incarceration programs, such as community service, drug and alcohol treatment, including Afro-centric mental health treatment options.
- **Provide** group homes and foster care families with support services (education, health, mental health, recreation, spiritual, socialization activities) as alternatives to detention. This process must include an assertive and aggressive approach which guarantees the accountability of the provision of said services for the needs of the children.
- **Provide** effective training and supervision to ensure that all staff, at all levels, will utilize demonstrated best practices throughout all juvenile justice systems and programs.
- **Work** with established neighborhood councils and other community groups in determining alternatives to detention/incarceration.
- **Provide** and/or expand quality education, recreation, health and mental health treatment and spiritual care to those in detention facilities. Juvenile justice system agencies and programs could also collaborate with other entities providing similar services.



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Law Enforcement

As in many other cities in the United States, there are no easy explanations for the rapid explosion of gun violence and homicides plaguing our area's neighborhoods. A common thread is evident. Gun violence is fueled by rampant unemployment and boredom due to lack of positive activities for youth, as well as robberies and disputes occurring over simple slights. Strategies and initiatives advocating gun violence reduction must be addressed immediately and will require unprecedented understanding and cooperation among all levels of the criminal justice system and the community. The public's perception and judgment of misconduct by some members of the area police bureaus is a serious concern, particularly police abuse of authority and a lack of just punishment for abusive behavior. Furthermore, a large proportion of the community continues to perceive that racial bias is inherent within the culture of area police bureaus.

Teamwork is essential in law enforcement activity, as well as “community policing” environments in which citizens, community groups and the police work together as equal partners to attack and solve this problem. Therefore, all levels of law enforcement should do the following:

- **Review** all existing police policies and procedures with a high level of input from community advisory coalitions or groups created with representation from the command staff or area police departments to identify options for improvement and evaluation.
- **Develop** a more racially balanced work force. Actively recruit and hire African Americans and Hispanics to the police force. Place community members on hiring boards.
- **Provide** training and exam preparation assistance for the police exam aimed at expanding the numbers of minority recruits to area police bureaus.
- **Challenge** state civil service laws, policies and practices that are discriminatory and which create barriers to the hiring of African Americans and other people of color within police, public safety and fire departments. The absence of racially balanced law enforcement agencies often contributes to the creation of tension and possible violence in the community.
- **Provide** police officers with sensitivity and cultural diversity training.
- **Insist** that police officers solicit information without being confrontational and generate voluntary compliance from law violators without resorting to physical force.
- **Give** greater authority to members of the Civilian Police Review Board to participate in investigations of alleged police misconduct, in the development of new standards of police conduct, and in the review and implementation of such new standards. Investigate other community-police relation advisory models from other cities.

- **Institute** better monitoring systems for the sales of all weapons, and create new and more effective systems that would strongly impact the sales of illegal firearms, especially assault weapons
- **Invest** as much money into rehabilitation as is invested in incarceration.
- **Encourage** more citizens to participate in the citizen's police academy to learn more about police operations, which would in turn foster better community relations.
- **Lobby** the political structure and law enforcement to change any laws that currently inhibit the employment, training, and educational opportunities for African Americans and other people of color.
- **Lobby** for laws that would allow the records of non-violent criminals to be expunged, either after completion of some criteria or after a short time period following release (one to two years).
- **Become** an integral part of the community by engaging in more positive communication with youth and parents. Develop better trust between the police, the youth and the community. Serve as positive role models for youth. Greet youth with help, not harassment.



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The Media

The media (TV, radio, newspapers and so forth) must understand the role they play in perpetuating negative images of African Americans. Having the ability *and* the responsibility to present a more balanced picture of our youth and our community, the media, should:

- **Develop** and promote programming that presents positive African American role models. Increase the number of positive images of African American families, as well as individuals, shown on television and in all other media.
- **Provide** opportunities for youth to produce and participate in forums about issues of importance to them, and provide venues for them to exchange information. Give ample media coverage for all summits, conferences, and gatherings that promote proactive, positive images of young people that help them empower themselves.
- **Broadcast** and televise Town Hall meetings for and about youth, as well as provide programming where the youth and adults can dialogue and exchange information to bring together the generations.
- **Provide** volunteer, internships, apprenticeship, and job opportunities to as many African Americans and other people of color as possible. Furthermore, the media must develop and expand their commitment to inform everyone about all media employment and job training opportunities throughout the region.
- **Make** a better effort to inform the community about existing employment and training programs within the community at large.
- **Hire** more people of color in all phases of the media industry.
- **Promote** and feature programming about corporations, governmental agencies, or community-based programs that are making special efforts to provide training or employment opportunities for African Americans and other people of color.
- **Fairly** and accurately report inequities imbedded in the current educational system, such as disparate educational outcomes, high dropout rates, and disproportionate suspension rates.
- **Be** more responsive to community complaints about programming, news items, or other media forms that continue to portray negative stereotypes about people of color.
- **Feature** anti-violence public service announcements.
- **Provide** more media coverage of community-based organizations that are doing positive things in the community.

- **Encourage** local and national media to utilize more people of color as “experts” on issues that affect the entire community, not just for issues concerned with the minority community.
- **Take** an active role in communicating the presence of community hotlines linking youth and families to immediate crisis intervention services.
- **Provide** ongoing exposure of positive role models, who happen to be people of color, not only during months specifically designated for certain cultures and ethnic groups.
- **Encourage** area companies and corporations to underwrite positive public service announcements and campaigns that support alternatives to violence.
- **Provide** educational programming that addresses community ills that contribute to helplessness and violence such as predatory lending, domestic abuse, and health disparities.
- **Conduct** a summit on minority imaging (including the adverse effects of stereotyping).



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The Media: Impact of Rap Music on Violence

Capitalizing on the huge popularity of rap music, the record labels, the movie and TV entertainment industry, as well as the advertising industry, have invested billions of dollars into promoting artists with music influenced by the gangster, the gang, and the pimp cultures. The entire entertainment industry, as well as a few rap stars, have gained huge financial benefits at the expense of the “hearts and minds” of millions of youth. Today’s youth are given a skewed view of life and are receiving mixed messages that are damaging to their healthy development and well-being when they are exposed to music videos, video games, or movies with violent themes. Even young children are being exposed to sexually explicit lyrics, curse words, and messages that glorify the ‘fast life.’ Playing violent video games desensitizes youth to the real consequences of violence. Heavy exposure to negative music and images has a great impact on youth violence in the African American community.

Everyone – the entertainment media, music artists, parents, and the community -- has to take responsibility for what our children and youth are seeing and hearing. These messages and images found in the music contribute to the violence that permeates the streets of our communities. There has to be a change. Therefore, the following groups should accept these challenges:

Parents and Families should:

- **Monitor** what music teens and children listen to and what they see in the media (TV, movies, videos, and games). Recognize and be ready to counteract the potentially damaging messages about gender roles, self-gratification and the acceptability of violence.
- **Prevent** children from playing violent video games, from watching violent movies and consuming other forms of media. Movies, music and pop culture glorify violence and have a strong influence on our youth.
- **Become** educated about the lyrics and the messages in the music and videos and have discussions with their children to help them understand the messages they receive. Be mindful that many of the messages in the music are subliminal.

Rap Artists should:

- **Take** creative control of their music. Learn about the true history of the Hip Hop culture, and reclaim the notion that rap music can be a vehicle for teaching social awareness in a more positive manner.
- **Stop** using curse words, as well as racist, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic and other hateful and derogatory words in their music.
- **Lay** the N –word to rest!

The music, advertising, and other media should:

- **Recognize** the harm being done to the mental and spiritual health and well-being of all youth by consistently promoting artists who project and exhibit harmful messages.
- **Promote** and nurture both local and national rap artists who present more positive messages.
- **Realize** they have traded profits for the well-being of our communities and must provide restitution. For example, provide financial support to community initiatives, agencies and programs counteracting violence.
- **Accept** their complicity in creating and promoting negative stereotypes of African Americans through the exploitation of Black talent.

The Community should:

- **Pressure** the local broadcast corporations to play more music with positive messages by local and national artists.
- **Support** rap artists who present more uplifting messages in their music; artists who do not use misogynistic, sexist, racist, or homophobic words and messages.
- **Lobby** local, state and federal legislators to encourage them to regulate, to the extent they can, violent content in the media.
- **Join** with artists, community leaders, and national spokespeople who advocate for a radical change in the rap music industry, which has seemingly lost its creativity, forgotten its original responsibility to uplift the Black Community through the promotion of the positive values coming from the Hip Hop culture.

See the Appendix for the full version:

A Historical Perspective of Rap Music As It Relates to Violence in the African American Community by Steve Johnson



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Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a community-strengthening alternative to the current prison-industrial complex that has particularly ruined the lives of too many Black youths and young adults. It is an attempt to reverse the damaging impact of a criminal justice system that traditionally relied on a policy of punitive justice resulting in lengthy incarceration and the lifelong stigma of a criminal record. Restorative justice views crime not only as breaking the law, but also as violating the relationships among people in the community. The goal of restorative justice is to repair the relationships between the offender and the other members of the community.

Restorative justice involves three critical elements:

- (1) The offender must “own up” to the crime and commit to “making things right.”
- (2) The individual/s harmed by the crime are allowed to express how the crime has impacted their lives and have a voice in determining the restorative action plan,
- (3) The parties involved are assisted by community members (mediators) to identify measures that must be taken to repair the harm caused by the criminal acts.

Restorative justice programs across the U.S. have drastically reduced recidivism rates, increased the amount of compensation available to victims of crime, and avoided expensive incarcerations. Many parties have a stake in the success of restorative justice projects and the following actions support the successful transformation of our criminal justice system.

Legislative System:

- **Pass** legislation rescinding mandatory sentencing laws to give local judges independence to determine the most appropriate means for responding to criminal acts.
- **Fund** restorative justice programs with money that otherwise would be budgeted to support expensive incarcerations.
- **Fund** effective mental health services, school systems, job training programs, and job development projects which strongly support the goals of restorative justice programs for reducing recidivism.

Local Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice System:

- **Identify** and provide training, in collaboration with community groups, for individuals who express an interest in becoming restitution mediators.
- **Refer** all petty/non-violent/first-time offenders to community mediation as a pre-trial diversion and dismiss criminal charges. Consider the referral of cases involving more significant crimes on a case-by-case basis.
- **Balance** the need to protect the public safety, when considering sentencing, with respect for the action plan for restitution recommended by the community mediator.

- **Fund** compliance monitoring and case management services that confirm whether offenders are fulfilling their responsibilities for providing compensation, performing community service, and making progress with academic and/or employment goals.
- **Dismiss** criminal charges after completion of all components of the restorative justice action plan.

Community Mediators

- **Represent** and know the community's standards of behavior for building and maintaining peace.
- **Facilitate** the process in which victims and criminal offenders discuss the crime and its impact.
- **Develop** an action plan that will benefit *both* the victim and the offender.

Victims of Crime

- **Participate** in the restorative justice processes with the support provided by victim service centers.
- **Respect** the action plan recommended by the community mediators.

Offenders

- **Participate** fully in the restorative justice processes. Reflect on how criminal acts cause pain and loss in the lives of the victims.
- **Take** responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Make suggestions regarding ways one could make amends for the crimes committed.
- **Respect** the recommendations of community mediators and commit to meeting the conditions of the action plan for making restitution.
- **Work** hard to achieve educational and/or employment goals intended to reduce the risk for recidivism. Ask for assistance from tutors, job coaches, and case managers when dealing with obstacles to set goals.

Parents / Guardians of Offenders

- **Request** that the offending child be offered an opportunity for restorative justice mediation.
- **Participate** fully in the restorative justice mediation processes.
- **Respect** the mediator's recommendations. Provide necessary authorizations for minors to participate in restorative activities.
- **Encourage** the offender to accomplish restorative activities.

Community Educational Institutions & Ecumenical Agencies

- **Engage** in community outreach to increase the awareness of, and provide support for, restorative justice processes as a viable alternative to the traditional punitive criminal justice system.
- **Provide** restorative justice training to community groups and individuals.

Foundations & Charitable Agencies

- Sponsor community outreach and education efforts to increase the awareness of and provide support for the use of restorative justice systems.
- Fund programs providing supplemental support to restorative justice systems including mental health and substance abuse treatment, remedial education, job training and job search assistance, and programs that provide opportunities for ex-offenders to perform community service and/or share their stories at forums that show the impact of crime on the community.



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Restorative and Rehabilitative Justice: The Role of Former Offenders

Having recognized the devastating effects their behavior has had on the life of the African American Community, persons incarcerated and formerly incarcerated in the justice system can provide invaluable service to the prevention of violence within our communities. One important role of these individuals would be to encourage youth on the outside not to enter into prison as a rite of passage, or view it as requirement (or definition) of manhood in the African American community and American society. Other roles include the following:

- **Continue** to meet among themselves to discuss and take actions through the networks they have established to reduce violence in the African American Community. Such identified actions could be shared with other community-based organizations, agencies, and religious groups attempting to impact violence.
- **Be** prepared to transition into educational, training and/or work programs prior to and/or upon release. Be open to participate in evaluations of program effectiveness to ensure that such programs meet the needs of affected individuals.
- **Detoxify** from drugs and alcohol and participate in treatment programs prior to and upon release.
- **Submit** voluntarily to both pre and post counseling and health testing, including health related issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, and assist in the elimination of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the African American Community.
- **Participate** in individual and community healing activities that address body, mind and spirit.
- **Encourage** family members to participate in neurological testing of children and youth, so that developmental and educational needs can be addressed appropriately for quality interventions, if needed.
- **Discourage** children and youth from falling prey to the influences and pressures of illegal activity. Such activities can lead to the death of the body, the mind and the spirit. Encourage oneself and others to engage in activities that will help fulfill the potential of the entire community.
- **Take** part in civic activities and leadership opportunities. Those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated have, in many cases, demonstrated leadership and entrepreneurial skills. These same skills now can be redirected for positive outcomes.
- **Register** to vote to build the political power of the African American community to ensure strides in education, health and economic development and overall community survival. The prohibition for registering to vote is only for people currently serving time for felonies. To further explain, a convicted felon may register to vote after being released from prison. Secondly, people presently serving time for a misdemeanor have the right to register and vote by absentee ballot.

- **Apply** to have offenses expunged as soon as possible after incarceration to be able to attend college and increase ones accessibility to the job market.
- **Engage** in cultural, recreational, intellectual, and social activities to build body, mind and spirit in order to deal with the impact that violence has on their lives and the lives of others. Such engagements would lessen and/or prevent future violence.
- **Relate** to women and children with respect and participate in male/female relationship-building workshops and activities.
- **Nurture** and financially support one's children and family.
- **Participate** in mentoring programs.



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Service Organizations

Non-profit service organizations can have a significant effect on reducing violence by offering quality programs that engage youth and adults positively; providing alternatives to violence; and providing activities which can also discourage destructive behavior. Being productive and creating an environment that is positive and supportive has an impact on violence prevention. Quality programs and services provide a way to engage its participants to intervene and challenge perspectives that lead to violent behavior. Other programs intervene more directly once the issue of violence has surfaced. In both cases, giving people hope and vision for a productive future becomes an incentive for people to avoid the cycle of violence. Therefore, service organizations should:

- **Coordinate** and collaborate with one another to avoid offering duplicative services and to fill in gaps in service. Collaborate on funding where possible and feasible. Sponsor and participate in ongoing consensus-oriented, democratic discussion/work groups to develop strategies and action plans for providing solutions.
- **Solicit** input from grassroots individuals, groups, and community collaborative efforts that may not be considered formal nonprofits or service organizations. Such entities may have strategies and action plans for providing solutions to the violence in our communities. These non-traditional resources can offer a unique and valuable perspective to such problems.
- **Apply** for funds that allow *needed* programs to be supported and expanded.
- **Create** opportunities for children and youth from different communities to come together in a safe environment. Keep facilities open late in the evenings and on Saturdays to give children a *safe* place to “hang out.”
- **Establish** and expand programs that expose children to a broader world-view, programs that take them out of their own communities. Provide a more holistic picture of the world around them. Expose youth to a wide range of experiences occurring in and out of the city.
- **Increase** the number of community events, which have the goal of eliminating fear and increasing opportunities for citizens to work together.
- **Support** youth centers where young people can go to hear speakers with messages that foster positive social, emotional, physical and spiritual growth. Introduce children, youth, and adults to successful people in their communities who have met and conquered many of the problems they have faced.
- **Promote** and expand programs that teach youth how to resolve issues in new and non-violent ways. Teach conflict resolution in a culturally sensitive manner. Develop and implement peer leadership programs that encourage youth, in partnership with adults, to take the lead in reducing violence.

- **Implement** sports programs that stress the importance of cooperation and teamwork. Offer opportunities beyond football and basketball. Provide more opportunities for physical activity and self-discovery such as soccer, rowing, boxing, swimming and hiking. These kinds of activities help to improve physical and emotional well-being, as well as providing healthy ways to channel anger and aggression.
- **Provide** resources for training programs and job search needs. Offer parenting skills classes and stress counseling with effective outreach to those who need it.
- **Provide** community-based extracurricular educational programs such as parent leadership skills, tutoring, GED preparation, computer skills, etc. for families with young children from birth to age five. Such programs prepare parents to get involved in their children's development and education from the start.
- **Provide** internships, apprenticeships and jobs for youth which can provide experience leading to wider career opportunities.
- **Initiate** and expand basic entrepreneur courses *and* help interested youth to create and develop small businesses.
- **Provide** community with information about available services of agencies and organizations. Such services should be offered on a sliding income scale.
- **Provide** adults with training for reaching and counseling youth in the community, in community organizations and in schools.
- **Work** to secure community funds for youth centers.
- **Hold** *all* political leaders accountable for their promises to support community-based, anti-violence initiatives and community enhancement programs.
- **Be** an advocate for youth whenever and wherever possible.



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Street Level Outreach

Anyone who works at the street level helps reduce violence by providing outreach, activities and services. Therefore, they should:

- **Begin** by developing personal, individualized relationships with young people and adults who might benefit from their guidance and interaction.
- **Help** youth get the services they need by identifying support services and developing individualized goal-oriented plans.
- **Serve** as advocates for youth. Be a link between youth and community stakeholder groups by providing those organizations with solutions to current issues and problems and bringing youth to the appropriate resources for help.
- **Provide** crisis intervention by serving as a liaison to offset violent incidents both before youth get involved with the police and afterwards to begin the healing process. This could also include the involvement of street level workers in resolving conflicts between youth from various neighborhoods, preferably before police intervention becomes necessary.
- **Look** for opportunities to prevent or diffuse conflict and to help youth learn to resolve their issues in new and less violent ways. Special emphasis should be placed on introducing them to mediation and conflict resolution skills.
- **Support** the community restorative justice system. Assist mediators in developing relationships with members of the community.
- **Help** keep children and youth in school. Reach out to youth who may need extra help to stay in school and introduce them to appropriate resources such as medical services, mental health services, substance abuse services, and alternative education programs designed for youth.
- **Encourage** *all* adults to stop fearing our youth. Invite people from the various neighborhoods to join street level workers to gain a better understanding of the problems youth face. This could include forming neighborhood block watches; holding community celebrations and picnics; engaging youth constructively; or simply by coming out to stand on one’s porch. Don’t be afraid to talk with our youth.
- **Encourage** the community *at large* to talk with youth and bring to them one’s concerns with understanding and respect
- **Show** youth how to use their “street skills” (hustling, etc.) in constructive, productive and legitimate ways. This will boost their self-esteem and validate their self-worth. Doing so contributes to preventing our youth from entering the criminal justice system.

- **Participate** in setting up and/or supporting family and youth hotlines and other emergency services.
- **Integrate** street-level initiatives with neighborhoods and families by connecting them with resources such as educational, vocational, legal services, and services provided by religious organizations.
- **Create** opportunities for youth who have overcome life obstacles to become role models for higher risk peers.
- **Identify** opportunities to educate youth about the ways in which emotions related to trauma and loss can be dealt with constructively.
- **Provide** community forums and educational opportunities for other adults to learn more about what they can actually do impact the violence that permeates the streets of *our* communities.
- **Conduct** voter registration and education programs. Organize the youth to vote and participate in positive political activities such as voter registration, flyer distribution, and making phone calls for getting out the vote. This provides an opportunity for youth *and* community empowerment.



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Youth

Be the change you want to see in the world. Become a leader in changing the culture of violence. Violence is a major public health issue affecting mental, physical, emotional, financial and spiritual health. Education, awareness, and prevention efforts are key components to reducing the prevalence of violence and its devastating impact on society. Youth must understand the high cost of violence, such as death, disability, incarceration, family disruption, community fear and distrust of youth, and its impact on the entire community. They must also respect the rights of others in order to earn respect. To reduce the violence that runs in our communities, youth must do the following:

- **Express** anger in a positive way and address personal issues with help from peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and others.
- **Organize** and call for an *immediate* end to *all* of the violence in our communities. Come together and participate in activities that work toward decreasing the tension that exists among individuals, various neighborhoods and communities. Create councils in each community that will be staffed and led by youth and guided by concerned and committed adults. These councils should meet regularly at a safe place to share relevant ideas and concerns. Invite adults and other youth from the various neighborhoods, who have been identified as being a positive influence in the community.
- **Advocate** for youth involvement on government and community boards seeking input from youth in diverse communities. Efforts should be made to improve communication between police and youth in the community and to build new bridges for mutual respect.
- **Participate** in opening lines of communication between youth and adults during community forums and other activities aimed at reducing violence. Reach out to parents, family members, and other adults to encourage them to participate in activities that youth enjoy. Youth are strongly encouraged to take advantage of all positive opportunities offered.
- **Practice** the proper way to conduct oneself when stopped by the police. Be aware of one's rights and responsibilities when dealing with the police. Take advantage of programs that provide these skills as well as other information. There are brochures and pamphlets provided by social service and government agencies. For example the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and the NAACP Pittsburgh Branch provide a pamphlet entitled “*You and the Police: Rights, Responsibilities and Realities.*” The City of Pittsburgh has published *Information for People Concerned about Police Conduct.*
- **Call** upon parents, guardians and loved ones to be good role models. Share with them the important role they play in influencing the lives and attitudes of children. If necessary *demand* they be good parents by being *present* in their lives. All too often some young people have been forced to take on the role of parenting younger siblings when parents or other family members have been unable to do so. Sometimes young people must take on the leadership role in displaying positive family and community values.

- **Demand** that parents, guardians and/or other caregivers take control of their households and provide the nurturing and discipline that children need from the earliest ages. To do so earns the respect of one's children.
- **Show** respect for parents, guardians and other adults in one's household so that they can trust children and youth to make responsible decisions. Lead by example and show younger siblings how to treat parents respectfully, so that when they become older, they will also be trusted to make good decisions.
- **Interact** with other youth in a respectful way to get respect in return.
- **Lead**, don't follow! Be strong and act independently. Young people should not try to be what *others* want them to be, unless those goals are positive. Far too many youth follow other youth who exhibit serious negative behaviors such as getting involved in unhealthy, and possibly criminal, actions. Be a role model to younger children and encourage them to achieve positive goals, as well.
- **Reject** the mindset that everyone else is the cause of one's negative life circumstances. This kind of attitude encourages one to play the role of victim and fosters feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and not having the ability to change one's life situation. Understand that one *does* have the *personal* power to change life's circumstances. Develop and adopt the faith to do so.
- **Utilize** one's talents and skills for positive purposes. It is in one's own best interest to pursue legal avenues to make money. Recognize that being involved in drugs and in other illegal activities contributes to the breakdown of the family and the community, imprisonment and even death. Remember that short term money will likely lead to short time lives!
- **Encourage** one's peers to look at legal employment as the preferred lifestyle, one that should be sought by *all* members of the community. Discourage them from continuing illegal and criminal behaviors. Help them understand if they continue they will be forced to suffer the consequences.
- **Influence** one's girlfriend or boyfriend in a positive manner. In many instances both young men and young women negatively influence, and even compete for authority, in their relationships. Be supportive of doing the "right thing." There is more value to a relationship when both parties wait before taking it the next level.
- **Delay** sexual involvement. Both boys and young men *and* girls and young women should place greater value on their bodies. Some girls and some young women believe they need to be sexually involved to maintain a relationship, which may include getting pregnant. Some young men believe that some young women use sex just to "trap" a man. Moreover, in some situations, because of the way girls and young women present themselves, some young men may feel pressured to engage in sexual activity. In all cases, such behaviors should be strongly discouraged. Sexual activity before becoming emotionally, and/or financially secure or responsible can lead to STDs, unplanned pregnancies, broken lives and broken dreams.
- **Discuss** healthy sexuality and how to build healthy relationships with parents, guardians, or other trusted adults, before becoming sexually active. Young men *and* young women both should participate in sexuality and family life planning education where available. Teen fathers and teen mothers should seek out and participate in parenting support/education programs.

- **Respect** the fact that boys and young men do not have the earning capacity of older males. Neither should boys or young men be expected to compete with adult males.
- **Understand** the fact that girls and young women should, in no way, encourage or force their boyfriends or partners to get involved in criminal behavior to provide for their needs or wants. Remember that material possessions do not bring happiness and should not determine someone's self worth – “*who* you are and not *what* you are.”
- **End** rumoring. Girls and young women are strongly encouraged to quit the rumors, which pit male against male. Such behaviors far too often lead to physical confrontations between competing young males, sometimes leading to death. Such deaths profoundly affect everyone involved, including the entire community.
- **Advance** academically. Realize the importance of making good grades and of being actively involved in positive school activities. Share with other students the fact that being a good student is the very best way to guarantee future employment and career success, and a much healthier community. Such students should be seen as the heroes of the school not the brunt of jokes and ridicule. Understand that to be smart is *not* acting *white*, and being smart is giving one the opportunity to be “green,” as in making money.
- **Mentor** younger children. Utilize one's talents to improve the educational achievement of the younger people in one's community. This is a constructive use of time and talent and it will positively affect the climate of the neighborhood in which one lives. Volunteering not only helps others, it also makes one feel better about him/herself.
- **Stay** in school and attain the highest level of education possible. Explore other avenues for further education beyond high school that lead toward a career path. These avenues may be technical or trade schools, as well as colleges and universities.
- **Complete** training programs that build trust/respect/self-esteem and give instruction on job application skills, interviewing skills, interpersonal skills, goal setting and job preparation. Take advantage of support systems and training that will teach one how to remain employed and advance one's career goals.
- **Demand** that *all* adults work diligently to assist youth in obtaining meaningful and legal employment. Youth should not feel that the only way to become financially stable is to engage in illegal or criminal behavior. Youth should seek employment opportunities with major businesses and corporations, as well as businesses in local communities.
- **Form** peer support/tutoring groups in schools, community centers, and religious institutions. Train to become peer educators in conflict resolution and anger management.
- **Participate** in student advisory boards that are balanced and diverse. Volunteer to become advocates/liasons between the student population and school administration to have a strong “voice” in their education.
- **Train** as volunteers to serve as youth counselors. Participate in related activities such as speak-out assemblies at churches, schools and community events.

- **Participate** in the political process by voting in each and every election because voting *does* impact every aspect of society. Even youth who have not reached voting age can make a difference. Get involved in the political process; participate in activities such as voter registration, flyer distribution, and making phone calls for getting out the vote.
- **Be involved** with the Coalition Against Violence. Youth from across neighborhood boundaries work together in all initiatives and strategies.
- **Develop** an anti-violence youth task force as an umbrella group of the Coalition Against Violence.



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It takes a Village to Raise a Child! It takes *everyone* to heal the community and end the violence.

Since its 'conception' on February 8, 2007, the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** has been striving to develop, write, and finally implement perhaps one of the most comprehensive and detailed documents ever produced in the Pittsburgh metropolitan region by 'ordinary' citizens. Filled with broad-based strategies for reducing violence in the Pittsburgh metropolitan region, the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** Document 2008 includes something for every segment of society to undertake in drastically reducing the violence that permeates so many of our neighborhoods and communities.

The process by which this document was written is, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary and unique processes ever to be utilized by any collaboration or coalition in the history of Pittsburgh. This was democracy *and* diversity in action. Anyone who came to the table had a 'voice' which was honored by everyone present. Each action item was thoroughly discussed by those present at the working sessions. This document was written by collective action, through collaboration and consensus. Without the dedication, time, commitment and faith of so many people, this document would not have been able to "move from complaint to possibility...from planning to implementation."

Therefore, the **COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE** wishes to acknowledge all of the members of the village who made this possible!

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“Moving from Complaint to Possibility...from Planning to Implementation”

Appendix

A Historical Perspective of Rap Music As it Relates to the Violence in the African American Community

By Steve Johnson

Music has always touched hearts and minds. People have expressed the social ills of their particular era through popular music, from jazz to rock 'n roll, to country. In the late 1970s, inner city youth (mainly African American and Latino youth) embraced a new culture and consciousness called “Hip Hop” with its innovative art, clothing, and music. The elements of Hip Hop included dee-jaying, graffiti art, break dancing and other dance forms, as well as emceeing or “rapping” over beats, and disseminating knowledge. Groups such as KRS-1 and Afrika Bambaataa with the Zulu Nation intended for rap music to be a tool for teaching the youth in a positive way. Rap lyrics were filled with messages about the realities facing many inner city youth, such as gang violence and drugs. Yet messages about love, unity, justice, respect, and responsibility were also incorporated in the music. During the mid 1980s, groups like Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions and X-Klan, Queen Latifah, and Salt 'n Peppa carried on the tradition of positive teaching through their music. With one or two exceptions, rap artists were mostly African American and a few Latinos.

From its beginnings, older people, both Black and white, viewed rap as an art form that would not last. While the artists were mostly youth of color, rapping about inner city life, the music was being purchased by more young White men, living in suburban and rural areas, than any other group in the US population. Seeing the huge potential for making millions by exploiting the Hip Hop musical form called emceeing or “rap,” the major music and advertising agencies seized the opportunity to capitalize on this gold mine and the Rap Industry was born.

In the early 90s “the industry labeled this new music form “Gangsta Rap.” One of the first groups to receive world-wide attention under this new “genre” was called *NWA* (Niggas with Attitude) from Compton, California. *NWA* gave “voice” to inner city youth, who lived the thug life, because they incorporated messages about police brutality, poverty, and crime – issues inner city youth face everyday. The message might have been about the realities of life, but the sexually explicit and violent images to which youth were being exposed from the “Gangsta Rap” videos held implications that could be seen as being potentially harmful to the “hearts and minds” of the youth. Capitalizing on the huge popularity of the particular form of music, the record labels, the movie and TV entertainment industry, as well as the advertising industry began to invest millions into promoting those artists with gangster material. Quite often, artists with more positive messages were ignored. Many of the Gangsta and the Crunk rappers have written more socially conscious music, as well. Yet, it appeared that artists who glorified the thug or player life-style received the greatest exposure from the music industry.

It was during this period in history that youth gangs began to rise in many of the inner cities. Rap became an issue of national security when the rapper Ice T wrote “Kill the Police” and Gangsta Rap became part of the national consciousness. Congressional hearings and boycotts of the music were called to protest the dangerous messages being espoused by many rappers. It did not matter that the music was the “voice” of many youths, who clearly understood the impact of poverty, police brutality, under-employment and mis-education on their daily existence.

The music corporations must have understood the effects that this music would have on the mentality of the community, especially the youth, but chose instead to keep getting rich. Music label executives and artist promoters heavily pushed “Gangsta Rap,” often to the exclusion of other forms of rap, thereby creating a new culture and mindset. Whether the rap artists actually lived the lives they spoke about in their music, they felt that to be hugely successful, they had no choice but to do “Gangsta Rap” if they expected to survive in the industry. Moreover, many of these rappers actually believe they are giving a positive message through their music when they give their personal testimonies about the realities of their lives. However, when they fail to see, or either choose to ignore the trap being set for them by the industry, such artists are only brainwashing themselves into believing the “hype” set forth by the record labels. Furthermore, many rappers glorify the “skewed” messages about power and wealth gleaned from mainstream movies, such as *Scarface* and other gangster movies.

In recent years, “Beef” CDs or DVDs have become very popular. Rappers “go at” each other to prove how much tougher they are than the next guy. These so-called “feuds” between rap stars may be a marketing ploy to drive up sales, but they also send a potentially dangerous message to the youth. These so-called “Beef” CDs are another brainwashing tool, and the youth are not aware of what is happening.

Far too many music albums, music videos, video games, movies, and other forms of media perpetuate negative stereotypes about African Americans and other people of color. Today’s youth are seeing a skewed view of life and are receiving mixed messages that are potentially damaging to their healthy development and well-being. Not only are young men receiving mixed messages about their manhood and their place in society, the messages about women are also potentially damaging because they tend to show women as objects. The music glorifies the gangster life as well as the pimp life with its fixation on fast cars, fast women, and big money. Furthermore, many adults are fearful that our Black youth are being brainwashed into thinking that they must be “gangster” in order to survive, or that one must be a “pimp” to get the woman and the money. This brainwashing may be evident in the state of young Black America today when two-thirds of the youth in prison are Black. This may be evident in the Pittsburgh region where the majority of homicide victims of gang-like or “drug-war” violence are Black.

What children hear and see shapes their growth and development. “We are all a product of our environment,” say the rappers.” However, not everyone in the inner city, or from the ‘hood’, is a gangster or a gang member, a “player”, or a “gold-digging” woman. Nevertheless, many youth try to emulate their favorite rap artists who glorify these things. This music also exposes young children to sexually explicit lyrics, curse words, and messages that glorify the “fast life.” Young people internalize the images and messages they receive from the music, and can become desensitized to the real consequences of violence when they are exposed to too many videos or movies with violent themes.

Rappers and the music industry both reap huge financial benefits, but do so at the expense of the “hearts and minds” of millions of youth. As stated previously, White males buy more rap music than any other group in the United States, approximately 80%. Furthermore, rap music is all over the world; youths from Russia to Africa, from Brazil to Europe are getting their blueprint from watching American videos and listening to rap music. Millions of young people think that all Black youth in America are pimps, players, gangsters and prostitutes, for these are the images they see. Moreover, millions of African American youth and children internalize these negative images. Add this to the effects of internalized oppression from racism, and even sexism, on Black people in this society. One might be tempted to conclude that youth violence in the African American community may be one of the effects of too much exposure to negative music.

Major corporations continue to invest heavily in “Gangsta Rap” or its latest incarnation known as “Crunk Rap,” artists with more conscious or positive messages receive less exposure or airplay. Unfortunately, radio stations all across the country will choose to play a song like “Pop, Lock, and Drop It,” with its sexually explicit lyrics, over a song like “I Know I Can” an anthem of self-esteem and self-determination. More often than not, many of the more conscious artists must turn to the music “underground” to get their music played.

The major music networks such as MTV or VH1 show all kinds of music, including Crunk music. However, until recently, BET, the “Black” network, had a late night rotation which featured the uncut, unedited and so-called more adult and sexually explicit versions of many of the videos shown on other times of the day. Furthermore, there are also websites, featuring the uncut or unedited lyrics of this music, to which even children can have access.

Do the rappers understand this or even care how our children and youth are affected by their music? Do the mostly White producers and executives understand or even care if the music they sponsor glorifies and perpetuates negative stereotypes? Do parents know exactly what their children are listening to on the radio, or seeing on TV? Is this music a contributing factor to the violence that permeates the streets of many African American communities?

Everyone -- the music executives and promoters, the TV music and radio network heads, parents and the community – must take responsibility for what our children and youth are seeing and hearing. If this music *is* a contributing factor to the violence that permeates the streets of our communities, there has to be a change.

Steven Johnson is the author of *Wake Up Young Black Males: Life Is What You Make It*.

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