

March 5, 1991

## AN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY FOR ELIMINATING NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME

### INTRODUCTION

A common and false allegation about urban life in America is that conditions in poor neighborhoods "force" residents into a life of crime. This view initially gained popularity after the urban rioting of the 1960s, specifically in the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission Report.<sup>1</sup> The myth persists today despite the fact that the vast majority of residents in low-income neighborhoods are law-abiding, and clamor loudest of all for improved police protection.<sup>2</sup>

While some criminologists hold that poor neighborhoods are "breeding grounds" for crime, evidence shows these experts actually reverse the real sequence of events. It is not that poverty in general breeds crime; it is crime, especially violent crime, that exacerbates poverty in neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> Crime makes not only the victim, but also the neighborhood poorer. Crime sets in motion a cycle of flight by law-abiding citizens, and disinvestment in housing

---

1 Kerner Commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968).

2 This myth is effectively debunked in Robert James Bidinotto, *Crime and Consequences* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1989).

3 See data in John J. DiLulio, Jr., "The Impact of Inner-City Crime," *The Public Interest*, Number 96, Summer 1989, pp. 28-46.

and business; this then triggers further flight that devastates the poorest neighborhoods and communities, dooming to failure even well-designed anti-poverty efforts.

**Ultimate Tax.** Writes former Director of the National Institute of Justice, James K. Stewart: "Crime is the ultimate tax on enterprise. It must be reduced or eliminated before poor people can fully share in the American dream."<sup>4</sup> Controlling crime is a precondition to improving the lives of the urban poor because no neighborhood can grow economically unless it is first safe. As sociologist Charles Murray, Visiting Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, notes, the key to reducing crime is to create an atmosphere of lawfulness.<sup>5</sup> Low-income neighborhoods explicitly should project the message to the would-be criminal, whether a resident or not, that crime is not tolerated, that moral principles are observed and enforced.

Government at all levels must launch an aggressive strategy to create such an atmosphere if a national urban anti-poverty effort is to succeed. This strategy especially should explore ways of involving the law-abiding urban poor in anti-crime activities. In this empowerment strategy, the poor themselves work with police and other local officials to identify sources of potential crime and restrict access of potential criminals to their neighborhoods and housing projects. In particular:

- ◆ Local governments should help neighborhood groups form anti-crime patrols, stimulate interest among residents in joining existing patrols, and hire private guards to augment the activities of local police forces. Public housing projects as well as more traditional neighborhoods should be the focus of such efforts.
- ◆ State legislatures should require stricter sentencing for repeat offenders and for all offenders convicted of using firearms in committing a burglary or robbery.
- ◆ The federal government should beef up the efforts of cabinet-level agencies, particularly the Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to stem violent crime and drug dealing in housing projects.
- ◆ Congress should make real the threat to stop funding the Legal Services Corporation if this agency continues to defend the "civil rights" of drug dealers facing eviction from public housing.
- ◆ Most important by far, the President and the rest of the federal government should emphasize to the American public and particularly to the

---

4 James K. Stewart, "The Urban Strangler: How Crime Causes Poverty in the Inner City," *Policy Review*, Number 37, Summer 1986, p. 8.

5 Charles Murray, "Crime in America," *National Review*, June 10, 1988, p. 35.

minority community that crime is less the outcome of poverty than its cause, and that until strenuous and innovative efforts are taken to defeat crime in the inner city anti-poverty programs cannot succeed.

## **CRIME AND THE LOW-INCOME URBAN POOR: THE HIDDEN COSTS**

Crime is increasing rapidly in America's cities. By November of last year, eight of the twenty largest cities already had set new records for homicides in a single year.<sup>6</sup> By year's end, New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Boston easily had broken records set in 1989. The more than 2,200 people murdered in New York City alone represented a more than 10 percent increase over the 1989 figure. In Washington, D.C., the 434 murders in 1989 and 483 murders in 1990 amounted to one murder for about every 1,400 residents.

Horror stories abound. In Detroit, an annual pre-Halloween arson rampage, customarily known as "Devil's Night," torched hundreds of buildings this October 29th through 31st, despite maximum precautions taken by local officials.<sup>7</sup> Remarkd one resident living next to a home that burned two years ago, "I'm afraid. It's like you're a prisoner in your own house. I wouldn't go out."<sup>8</sup>

Most obvious, of course, are the immediate costs of crime; the victim's injuries or loss of some wealth. The poor usually suffer most not just because they have little wealth to lose but also because they live in neighborhoods where crimes are common. Less obvious but often more important, are the indirect costs of crime, affecting not only the person robbed but anybody living in the same neighborhood. These indirect costs are of two types: crime that creates poverty among the innocent, whether or not they have been actual crime victims, and crime that creates poverty among criminals.

### **How The Innocent Pay**

Fear of crime forces innocent people into forms of behavior that would be unnecessary in a crime-free environment. The fear of being beaten, robbed, or murdered can make it impossible for residents of a crime-infested neighborhood to become productive employees or business owners. Writes the Na-

---

6 These and all other statistics on crime incidence, unless otherwise noted, are derived from local police departments and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *Uniform Crime Reports*, released semi-annually and annually. The data reflect only those crimes reported to law enforcement agencies, not necessarily the total crimes committed. The crimes are separated into violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property crimes (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson).

7 "Halloween Fires, Arrests Rose in Detroit," *Washington Times*, November 5, 1990.

8 "Detroit Pulls Out All Stops to Foil Arson on Devil's Night," *Washington Times*, October 31, 1990.

tional Institute of Justice's Stewart: "The traditional means by which poor people have advanced themselves – overtime, moonlighting, education to improve future opportunities – can be easily obstructed by crime and fear. Why risk a late job or night school if the return home means waiting at deserted bus stops and walking past crowds of threatening teenagers?"<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps nothing illustrates the fear gripping so many of today's low-income urban neighborhoods than the construction by the City of Los Angeles of a concrete wall around one of its junior high schools to keep stray bullets from hitting children on the playground.<sup>10</sup>

**Depressing Property Values.** Fear of criminals depresses the willingness of families to move into and stay in neighborhoods. This then depresses property values. If potential buyers of property, whether occupied or vacant, believe that it is in a high-crime neighborhood, they offer a lower price for the property than they would have in the absence of crime.<sup>11</sup>

This has a devastating effect on the poor. If they are homeowners – many poor own their own homes<sup>12</sup> – their principal asset is devalued. This is the equivalent of criminals robbing a family's savings account. If residents are apartment owners, they may be unable to find any buyers when they wish to sell, and they have difficulty finding responsible renters. This in turn discourages the landlord from spending money on maintenance, which in turn triggers the cycle of crime and further decay.

**Housing Stock Deteriorates.** Even those owners who want to improve their property are deterred by crime. Since crime reduces property values, homeowners and apartment owners alike may find it very difficult to obtain credit for purchase or improvement loans. The result: The housing stock deteriorates despite intentions of owners. Much of the "redlining" allegedly practiced by mortgage lenders (a practice by which lenders designate certain neighborhoods as too risky for loans) actually is a rational response to fears that falling real property values will impose a huge loss on the lenders in the event of default. For this reason even creditworthy borrowers in such neighborhoods are denied the capital to improve their properties. Explains a resi-

---

9 Stewart, "The Urban Strangler," p. 6.

10 James Q. Wilson and John J. DiIulio, Jr., "Crackdown," *New Republic*, July 10, 1989, p. 21.

11 For evidence that crime hurts property values, see Wesley G. Skogan, *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods* (New York: Free Press), 1990, pp. 65-84. See also R. P. Taub, *Paths of Neighborhood Change: Race and Crime in Urban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

12 Thirty-eight percent of America's below-poverty-line households own their own homes, and 58 percent of these are non-elderly. See Robert Rector, Kate Walsh O'Beirne, and Michael McLaughlin, "How 'Poor' Are America's Poor?" Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 791, September 21, 1990, p. 9.

dent of a heavily vandalized Chicago neighborhood: "If you tell a bank that it is the Wicker Park area you want to buy into, they'll refuse you credit."<sup>13</sup>

**Enormous Burdens.** The resulting property deterioration and subsequent abandonment is documented in every urban neighborhood in America where criminals reign. It is especially true in public housing. In Chicago, for example, over 5,000 publicly-owned dwellings stand vacant, most as a result of vandalism and youth gang violence.<sup>14</sup> In New Orleans' Desire public housing project, sixteen residents were slain in just the first nine months of 1990.<sup>15</sup>

Tallied among crimes costs too are the higher taxes paid by all of a city's residents, including those in high-crime neighborhoods, because of the heavy cost of police protection and running courts, jails, and prisons. Violent crime also imposes enormous burdens on the health and social service systems.

In cities of more than 500,000 people, police, fire protection, and social service portions of municipal budgets not only rose rapidly during the 1980s, they did so at rates well exceeding the overall municipal budgets.<sup>16</sup> In Washington, D.C., during 1982-1987, for example, expenditures for these three combined areas rose by 66.2 percent, compared with the increase for the entire local budget of 43.3 percent.

**Crime-Expenditure Linkage.** Yet when local governments respond to the costs of crime by raising taxes or fees, they risk driving out law-abiding residents and businesses. Cities faced with high crime rates typically face heavy tax burdens. An analysis of crime and taxes over a 30-year period by Northwestern University political scientist Herbert Jacob reveals just how close the crime-expenditure linkage is. While all cities in a ten-city survey showed large increases in police expenditures, by far the ones with the largest increases were the ones with the highest increases in crime rates.<sup>17</sup>

Another cost of crime is that employers are reluctant to expand or relocate in high-crime neighborhoods even if given economic development incentives. When an office, store, or factory is said to be in a dangerous neighborhood, employers have difficulties finding and retaining a work force. The evidence on business location decisions shows that fear of crime strongly encourages employers to avoid establishing facilities in poor neighborhoods or to relocate existing facilities to safer neighborhoods or jurisdictions.<sup>18</sup> If the firm

---

13 Skogan, *Disorder and Decline*, p. 79.

14 John McCormick, "Can Chicago Beat the Odds?" *Newsweek*, January, 2, 1989, pp. 24-26.

15 Guy Gugliotta and Michael Isikoff, "Violence in the '90s: Drugs' Deadly Residue," *Washington Post*, October 14, 1990.

16 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *City Government Finances*, Series GF, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), annually.

17 Herbert Jacob, "Policy Responses to Crime," in Paul Peterson, ed., *The New Urban Reality* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 225-52.

18 Stewart, "The Urban Strangler," p. 7; DiLulio, "The Impact of Inner-City Crime."

compensates for the fears of employees by offering higher wages and salaries, its labor costs rise, hence making it less competitive with firms outside such areas.

**Losing Neighborhood Businesses.** Local residents, fearing crime, are unwilling to patronize neighborhood businesses during evening hours. Business owners may be willing to bear the risk of crime in order to attract evening customers, but if residents are too frightened to shop, many of the businesses will not survive. As a result, many inner city residents no longer enjoy the convenience of having neighborhood stores. A lengthy trip thus may be required for groceries, clothing, and other household goods.

New small businesses in high-crime areas often cannot obtain property insurance or small business loans except at high rates – if at all. Small business in New York City alone loses about \$1 billion a year from arson, shoplifting, burglary, robbery, and in other crimes.<sup>19</sup> Such crimes can be calamities for inner city businesses. The recent default by investors in a commercial mall in a high-crime area in the Northeast section of Washington, D.C., underscores how retail activity housed in a new, attractive complex, even with substantial pre-opening publicity, may not be able to survive.

When fear of crime drives out or cuts back the hours of neighborhood enterprises, employment opportunities shrink. This is especially harmful to teenagers seeking their first jobs. If they are to enjoy productive lives as adults, avoiding the welfare dependency trap, they must develop marketable skills before they enter adulthood.

**Fear in Schools.** Urban schools deteriorate. According to Karl Zinsmeister, crime and education expert at the American Enterprise Institute, each year about 3 million crimes are attempted or completed inside schools or on school grounds.<sup>20</sup> Assaults alone constitute about 10 percent of these offenses. The response to the climate of fear by some children is to avoid school altogether. A significant portion of today's truancy problem, observes Zinsmeister, results from a child's fear of being terrorized. He notes that about 8 percent of all urban junior and senior high school students miss at least one day of classes each month because they fear physical assault by other students. It is not simply students who are fearful. According to Zinsmeister, about one in five teachers are assaulted on the job each year, with 12 percent hesitant to confront the guilty party for fear of reprisal. Not surprisingly, talented and ambitious teachers will avoid transfers to crime-ridden schools, reducing the ability of the school to provide a good education.

---

19 Cited in George F. Will, "New York, New York, It's a Declining Town," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1989.

20 Karl Zinsmeister, "Growing Up Scared," *Atlantic*, June 1990, p. 61. All the educational data here come from this article.

## How Even Criminals Eventually Pay

When a criminal robs a business owner or pedestrian of cash, or receives hundreds or even thousands of dollars for a single drug deal, naturally he feels this beats what he may see as a low-paying "dead end" job. As Robert J. DeFauw, former Director of the Detroit office of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), noted in 1984: "Our major problem is, how are we going to reach these kids? I mean, do you tell them to work at J.L. Hudson's for \$45 a week when they're making \$2,000 a week selling drugs on the street? They'll just laugh at you."<sup>21</sup> His words remain applicable today.

Despite what appear to be financial advantages for the criminal, the evidence shows that he or she, too, ultimately becomes a victim. This is true for several reasons.

**First**, an inner city criminal career often leads to serious injury or death. In Washington, D.C., for example, police estimate that over half of the murders in their jurisdiction during 1985-1988 involved a dispute between drug dealers.<sup>22</sup>

**Second**, while an individual crime results in incarceration less than 2 percent of the time,<sup>23</sup> a teenage criminal faces strong odds of eventually being arrested and convicted if he maintains his activity into his 20s. This is because street crime requires almost daily activity to be profitable. It takes several felonies each week just to rob the equivalent of what could be earned honest-

---

21 Howard Blum, "U.S. Helps Detroit to Attack Drug Rings," *New York Times*, January 28, 1984.

22 *U.S. News and World-Report*, "Dead Zones," Special Report, April 10, 1989, p. 25.

23 U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), annually.

ly at a modest job.<sup>24</sup> The odds catch up with many. Over 3.5 million American adults are on parole or on probation in addition to the 700,000 currently in state or federal prisons.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from the loss of potential income while in prison, an adult with a criminal record once released finds himself unemployable in many jobs. According to a Justice Department study, some 40 percent of ex-prisoners who have been free for under one year make less than \$500 monthly.<sup>26</sup> With the range of legitimate employment choices diminished, the temptation to return to the streets is greater. Over 60 percent of criminals released from prison are rearrested for another offense within three years, and most of them are convicted.<sup>27</sup> According to Washington, D.C., Police Chief Isaac Fulwood, it is common for the same person, once out of prison, to be arrested eight or nine times in the same neighborhood within weeks.<sup>28</sup>

**Third**, a criminal's frequent refusal to finish high school severely reduces lifetime earning capacity.<sup>29</sup> Recent studies show that the decision to drop out of high school reduces the individual's income over the long run, and increases the likelihood of unemployment.<sup>30</sup> About one in six high school dropouts are unemployed, a rate roughly triple to that of the general labor force.<sup>31</sup>

The lack of education and the decision to pursue a criminal career reinforce each other. Just as poor performance in school makes a life of crime more attractive, a young criminal's initially successful forays into crime in-

---

24 Samuel Walker, *Sense and Nonsense About Crime: A Policy Guide*, 2nd ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1989), p. 258.

25 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Probation and Parole 1987*, Bulletin NCJ-113948, and *Probation and Parole 1988*, Bulletin NCJ-113948, reprinted in U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1989* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1990), p. 556.

26 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Profile of State Prison Inmates 1986*, Special Report NCJ-109926 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, January 1988), p. 3.

27 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983*, Special Report NCJ-116261 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, April 1989), p. 5.

28 DiLulio, "The Impact of Inner-City Crime," p. 40.

29 U.S. Department of Justice, *Recidivism of Prisoners*, p. 5. According to this study, 67.3 percent of all sampled released adult prisoners had less than a high school degree. In fact, close to 20 percent had no education beyond the 8th grade.

30 Michael McLaughlin, "High School Dropouts: How Much of a Crisis?" Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 781, August 3, 1990, pp. 8-9; Wayne J. Howe, "Do Education and Demographics Affect Unemployment Rates?" *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 111, No. 1, January 1988, pp. 3-9; James P. Markey, "The Labor Problems of Today's High School Dropouts," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 111, No. 6, June 1988, pp. 36-43.

31 Markey, "The Labor Problems of Today's High School Dropouts," p. 36.



duce him to believe that education "isn't worth it." This is especially true among minors, because even if convicted of an offense, they rarely get more punishment than a warning. Typically, they conclude that crime does pay.<sup>32</sup>

**Fourth, criminals are less likely than others to develop the personality and values necessary for entering into and sustaining a marriage. They tend to marry less — fewer than half of the adult inmates in state prisons ever have been married.<sup>33</sup> A stable marriage not only has the capacity to induce a man to be gainfully employed, it also steers him away from crime.<sup>34</sup> If during a marriage, a man remains a criminal, or reverts to being one, the odds are substantial that his wife will leave him. With this realization, a man who values a marriage avoids crime. Equally important, his children are less likely to become criminals if he stays with his wife.<sup>35</sup>**

## HOW TO REDUCE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME

There is a growing realization that the best strategies for fighting crime in residential neighborhoods are those where the police work closely with resident organizations. Such community-based strategies require residents to believe that others in their neighborhood are committed to a crime-free environment. Then they will be more willing to take part in public or private anti-crime programs, and be mobilized by police forces. "Community-oriented policing," as this is known, attempts to prevent crimes rather than investigate them after the fact. As crime experts James Q. Wilson, Collins Professor of Management at UCLA, and George Kelling, Fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, write:

Community-oriented policing means changing the daily work of the police to include investigating problems as well as incidents. It means defining as a problem whatever a significant body of public opinion regards as a threat to community order. It

---

32 For recent evidence, see "Kids and Crime," Special Report, *Insight*, July 30, 1990, pp. 9-13.

33 U.S. Department of Justice, *Profile of State Prison Inmates 1986*, p. 3.

34 See Marvin E. Wolfgang, Terence P. Thornberry, and Robert M. Figlio, *From Boy to Man, from Delinquency to Crime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 138-43. The authors found that while marriage significantly reduces a man's willingness to lead a life of crime, merely cohabitating with a woman and/or fathering her child do not.

35 The evidence is persuasive that children and teenagers are less likely to grow up with problems of mental illness, violence, drug use, and poor school performance when both parents are present in the home. For a review of recent studies, see Nicholas Davidson, "Life Without Father: America's Greatest Social Catastrophe," *Policy Review*, Number 51, Winter 1990, pp. 40-44.

means working with the good guys, and not just against the bad guys.<sup>36</sup>

Community groups and police forces now have a considerable body of experience drawn from successful experiments in community-oriented policing. This evidence suggests that several tactics are key to a successful approach, and that government policies can help in a number of ways. Among these:

**1) Create more police foot patrols.**

The evidence indicates that deploying more foot patrol police officers in a high-crime neighborhood can make substantial headway against crime. Charleston, South Carolina, is a case in point.<sup>37</sup> When Reuben Greenberg in 1982 took over as Police Chief of that city of 80,000, he inherited one of the nation's most crime-ridden cities for its size. One of his first steps to tackle the problem was to create an elite unit of foot patrolmen. Friendly and cooperative with neighbors, yet tough and agile enough to chase and catch a fleeing suspect, these patrolmen have deterred criminals, especially drug dealers, from preying on poor neighborhoods.

Under Greenberg, crime in Charleston has fallen 42 percent. So successful is his strategy viewed that he was invited early last year by Mobile, Alabama, with a population of 200,000, to design a similar program for that city. Five months after Mobile adopted the Greenberg plan, Mobile's serious crime fell by 18 percent.<sup>38</sup>

Results from other cities are also encouraging. In Flint, Michigan, a city of nearly 150,000, foot patrol officers since 1979 have been trained to refer citizens to social service agencies when the police detect domestic problems or alcohol and drug abuse. The idea is to prevent residents with such problems from falling into a pattern of crime. In the fourteen experimental areas established by the Flint police as high-crime districts, crime rates declined an average of 8 percent in the first three years of the program; by contrast, rates rose 10 percent in areas without the program.<sup>39</sup> In Los Angeles, a foot patrol program, Secured Areas Footbeat Enforcement (SAFE), begun last year but now discontinued due to budget cuts, was popular in several of that city's poorer neighborhoods.

**What Government Can Do**

Foot patrol programs have proven to be a successful method of deterring street crime. The U.S. Justice Department and state justice departments

---

36 James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "Making Neighborhoods Safe," *Atlantic*, February 1989, p. 49.

37 Edwin Meese III and Bob Carrico, "Taking Back the Streets," *Policy Review*, Number 54, Fall 1990, pp. 26-27; Suzanne Fields, "Safer with Fleetfeet on the Beat," *Washington Times*, November 8, 1990.

38 Ed Foster-Simeon, "A Matter of Taking Back City Streets," *Washington Times*, November 6, 1990.

39 Meese and Carrico, "Taking Back the Streets," pp. 23-24.

should consider making law enforcement assistance to localities contingent upon local government at least exploring the merits of a police or private guard foot patrol program.

## **2) Create citizen patrols.**

Unarmed community volunteers, working together and with the local police force also seem able to deter street crime. Like police foot patrols, their presence itself warns drug dealers and other criminals that the neighborhood has been put "off-limits."

A good example is in Washington, D.C., where more than 130 neighborhood crime watch groups involve about 6,000 residents. In several neighborhoods, residents armed with video cameras and walkie-talkies film drug transactions and write down license plate numbers, later relaying the information to the police. The aim is to target drug customers rather than dealers, and thus to reduce the demand for drugs. Their effort has closed dozens of crack houses and reduced open-air drug dealing. Other Washington neighborhoods have expressed enthusiasm for similar groups.

Establishing community patrols makes residents appreciate their own power to change the neighborhood. Explains Jim Foreman, coordinator of the Metro Orange Coalition, the umbrella organization for local crime watch groups in Washington, "Usually when you go out to see a group, they are afraid about what is on the street. Once you get them there, they see the power of togetherness, what they can do."<sup>40</sup>

The Guardian Angels pioneered such neighborhood patrols. The organization first gained national attention a decade ago for their efforts in fighting crime in New York City's subways. No volunteer organization has done more to make America's streets less dangerous. With dozens of active chapters, the Guardian Angels are scrupulous about maintaining good relations with local police. They enter a community only at the invitation of residents. They have substantially reduced crime in a number of Washington, D.C.-area apartment complexes.<sup>41</sup> The Angels have worked hard at building a reservoir of good will among public officials. Francis Keating, General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), acknowledges that they are a key element in HUD's Drug Elimination Program, which makes available grants to housing authorities to assist in the elimination of drug-related crime in public housing projects.<sup>42</sup>

---

40 Mark Vane, "Community Patrols Help in Drug War," *Washington Times*, November 26, 1990.

41 "Apartment Security Is Heaven-Sent," *Insight*, June 4, 1990, pp. 20-22.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

## **What Government Can Do**

Governments should seek ways to establish citizen crime patrol programs in low-income neighborhoods. The bureaucratic obstacles to such arrangements have been overcome where neighborhood groups and police work closely. HUD, for example, works with housing authorities around the country in providing technical assistance to tenant anti-crime patrols. In Baltimore, for instance, elderly residents in the city's public housing projects, with walkie-talkies, report to local police suspicious and illegal behavior they see.

Localities should encourage low-income resident associations to take the lead in establishing patrols. Beside patrolling, these patrols could provide literature to neighborhood residents to encourage them to leave on their lights at night, trim their shrubs and bushes for greater visibility, and arrange for the Post Office not to deliver mail when they are out of town. These groups also could give city building inspection and police departments information on vacant dwellings, especially those that may function as drug houses.

### **3) Make public housing safe.**

Crime rates in public housing projects tend to exceed the city average. Thus, while Chicago's serious crime rate already is almost quadruple the national average, the rate in three of its most notorious projects — Cabrini-Green, Stateway Gardens, and Rockwell Gardens — ranges from double to quadruple even that of the whole city.<sup>43</sup>

In the late-1980s, federal and local agencies began taking decisive action to tackle public housing project crime. HUD Secretary Jack Kemp was prompted to do so after the March 1989 murder of an Alexandria, Virginia, police officer who tackled a crack dealer holding a tenant hostage in a public housing project. It subsequently was learned that other project residents knew that the apartment long had been used for drug dealing and had complained to housing officials. Complex eviction procedures, however, had made it impossible to remove the drug-dealing tenants. Under this procedure, it normally took one to two years to evict someone from public housing. Since the Alexandria murder, HUD has waived these eviction requirements for close to 40 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>44</sup>

---

43 McCormick, "Can Chicago Beat the Odds?"

44 James P. Moran, Jr., "High Noon in Alexandria: How We Ran the Crack Dealers Out of Public Housing," *Policy Review*, Number 53, Summer 1990, pp. 78-81.

A police response to public housing tenant requests for better protection can reduce crime. When the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) in late 1988 asked police to raid suspected gang hideouts and crack dens in one of the Rockwell Gardens buildings, violence dropped dramatically, and residents no longer felt they had to sleep in closets and bathtubs for safety from flying bullets.<sup>45</sup> CHA Director Vincent Lane vows to make every project free of gangs and drugs. Similar results were reported in a get-tough program started by Omaha's Housing Authority.<sup>46</sup>

### What Government Can Do

Public housing authorities should establish comprehensive programs to combat crime and drug abuse in public housing. These programs should include better screening of prospective tenants; neighborhood foot patrols; information-sharing with police and housing authorities on criminals, suspected drug activity, and vacant apartments; and tenant drug education and referral outreach services.

In each program, tenant involvement is critical. Without it, the fear established by drug dealers and other criminals will not be removed. The housing authorities of Orlando, Florida, and Savannah, Georgia, have taken major steps in this direction. In both cities, police act as community organizers working closely with tenants. Officers take children on field trips and to ball games, introducing them to a world of non-criminal activities. As a result of this, drug activity in projects of both cities, especially Savannah, has been greatly reduced.<sup>47</sup>

With the enactment last fall by Congress of the HOPE (Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere) program, the federal government now can play an important role in reducing public housing crime. HOPE provides funding to tenant organizations to manage or own their housing projects, and puts housing authorities in a better position to eliminate public housing decay. When law-abiding tenants have responsibilities in running their projects, they will be apt to take action against the criminal element. HUD should further streamline its eviction procedure for all states in response to widespread tenant complaints. Because drug dealing is often a family activity, the new procedure, where based on good evidence, should allow for the eviction of the family.

---

45 McCormick, "Can Chicago Beat the Odds?" pp. 24-25. For an excellent full treatment of reforms recently undertaken in Chicago's public housing program, see Andrew Cooper, *Enabling the Underclass: Vince Lane's Campaign to Restore Rights and Responsibilities in Chicago's Public Housing*, Public Entrepreneurship Series, No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute, December 1990).

46 Robert L. Armstrong, "Something Upbeat Is Going On in Omaha's Public Housing," *Governing*, December 1990, pp. 36-41.

47 "Orlando, Savannah Report Success in Fighting Drug Problem," *Housing and Development Reporter*, January 21, 1991, p. 790.

**Misguided Defenders.** The primary obstacles to ridding projects of criminals, especially drug dealers, are the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the federally-funded Legal Services Corporation, and the backing these groups receive from their allies in Congress. These organizations consistently have opposed eviction and other crime prevention measures in public housing on the grounds that they violate the civil rights of low-income persons. That most tenants in housing projects are both poor and law-abiding, and that they plead for such action, apparently is of little concern to these radical legal organizations. Congress should consider eliminating support of the Legal Services Corporation if it continues to use any money for defending drug dealers.

#### **4) Hire quality private security guards.**

When security guards work closely with residents and police, they can be a valuable tool in reducing crime in low-income neighborhoods. Between 1975 and 1988, the number of private security guards increased from 400,000 to 1.4 million nationwide. By contrast, the number of full-time public police officers rose from 400,000 to just 600,000 during this period.<sup>48</sup>

Private security guards normally are not as well-trained as policemen, and usually carry no firearms. Yet they can be an effective and comparatively inexpensive addition to police forces if both cooperate and communicate closely. According to Richard Neely, Chief Justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and a recognized crime expert, it costs far more to put a uniformed police officer than a private guard on the street.<sup>49</sup> This is because guards are hired to prevent crimes rather than investigate them. The average police officer spends about two percent of his or her time actively patrolling, with the bulk of time devoted to such activities as responding to calls, doing paperwork, and testifying in court. Private guards devote about 90 percent of their time to patrolling and crime prevention.

The use of private guards, paid and volunteer, has cut crime in housing projects in the nation, particularly in Starrett City, a moderate-income high-rise apartment development in New York City, and in drug-infested Mayfair Mansions, a Washington, D.C. public housing complex whose tenants for years had been calling upon the housing authority to take action.

#### **What Government Can Do**

Local government and housing authorities can hire private security guards from among residents of low-income neighborhoods and housing projects themselves. Training such persons to be guards, who work closely with police, would announce clearly that a neighborhood will be thoroughly patrolled, even if not by police. It also would provide primary or secondary employment

---

48 Richard Neely, "Law and Order – Do It Yourself," *Washington Post*, October 21, 1990.

49 *Ibid.*

for these residents. HUD allows payment for such guards from federal Drug Elimination Act funds and the public housing operating budget.

#### **5) Clean up neighborhoods.**

The worse a neighborhood looks, the more crime it tends to suffer. According to UCLA's Wilson and Harvard's Kelling, broken glass, uncollected trash, abandoned cars, graffiti, vagrants, and prostitutes proclaim to criminal and resident alike that a community cares little about what happens in its streets.<sup>50</sup> This is an open invitation to criminals and helps drive away those who otherwise might live or open businesses there. This is confirmed statistically by recent research, especially by the Director of Northwestern University's Program in Law and the Social Sciences, Wesley G. Skogan.<sup>51</sup>

The reverse also is true. When residents take the simple step of cleaning their neighborhood, it tells criminals that the residents care about their community and thus are more likely to report criminal behavior. Where conscientiously applied, a clean-up strategy cuts crime. Example: The New Briarfield Apartments in Newport News, Virginia, suffered a massive increase in crime during the mid-1980s, terrorizing its low-income residents, and driving many away. Nearly one-fourth of the apartments were being burglarized at least once a year. In an attempt to take control of the neighborhood away from the criminals, the police in 1984 began to work with other municipal agencies and with tenants in launching a campaign to clean up trash, fill potholes, haul away abandoned cars, and sweep the streets. The result was a 35 percent decline in burglaries within three years.<sup>52</sup>

#### **What Government Can Do**

Local governments should sponsor frequent community clean-up days in high-crime neighborhoods. Working with resident organizations, state and local governments can be more diligent about towing away abandoned vehicles. New York City is now aggressively removing graffiti from public buildings and subway cars and stations; other cities with graffiti problems should follow New York's lead. Graffiti vandals, especially gang members who typically use graffiti to mark turf, should be dealt with harshly by the courts and sentenced to perform community service in addition to serving a jail term.

---

50 James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "Broken Windows," *Atlantic*, March 1982, pp. 29-38; see also Wilson and Kelling, "Making Neighborhoods Safe."

51 Skogan, *Disorder and Decline*. See also Daniel Lewis and Greta Salem, *Fear of Crime: Incivility and the Production of a Social Problem* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1986); D.J. Kenny, *Crime, Fear, and the New York City Subways* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

52 Wilson and Kelling, "Making Neighborhoods Safe," pp. 46-47.

One obstacle to a clean-up program is the unwillingness of local bureaucracies to encroach upon each others' territories. To avoid this, separate inter-agency task forces should be created, with employees from various agencies consulting with neighborhood residents in developing strategies in their own agency's programs.<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, local governments should privatize sanitation, street cleaning, public housing management, and certain other services. Through privatization, these services would be provided more efficiently, and at lower cost. As a result, fewer "broken windows" would be visible to the criminal.

#### **6) Create physical barriers to crime.**

An increasingly common technique of community policing is limiting access to a neighborhood. In many cases, the police, with the cooperation of resident leaders, erect barricades and guard posts at street intersections. Well-known is the Los Angeles Police Department's "Operation Cul-de-Sac."<sup>54</sup> When a crack cocaine epidemic hit the south Los Angeles neighborhood of Newton in the late-1980s, gang members terrorized the neighborhood. Of the 873 murders in Los Angeles in 1989, 100 were in Newton.

Working with residents, police created a "Narcotics Enforcement Area" in February 1990. Police limited access to the community by constructing entry gates at street entrances and exits. They also interrogated suspicious persons where there was a legal basis to do so. As a psychological barrier, the police put up the sign, "OPEN TO RESIDENTS ONLY" at each gate. The program enjoyed the strong support of the residents, many of whom had been too terrified to leave their homes after dusk. Within six weeks, violent crime in Newton had fallen by 90 percent; attendance at the nearby 2,600-student Jefferson High School had risen by 150 to 200 students a day; and residents rededicated a park that previously had been controlled by gangs. Then the barricades were removed — and crime, including several drive-by shootings — returned. The police brought back the barricades. Los Angeles police also instituted street barricade programs in the Sepulveda area of the San Fernando Valley. Within months, crime had been cut by about one-third.

#### **What Government Can Do**

Through close links with community leaders, local governments can adopt the tactics of Operation Cul-de-Sac to limit access to some neighborhoods. This of course needs broad neighborhood support, lest the operation harass and thus anger law-abiding persons living in, visiting, or passing through these neighborhoods. Police departments, with the help of neighborhood groups, should identify where the crime problems are, and then cordon off the key in-

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> See discussions of the program in Eloise Salholz, "The 'Walled Cities' of L.A.," *Newsweek*, May 14, 1990, pp. 24-25; Meese and Carrico, "Taking Back the Streets," pp. 27-28.



tersections and provide residents with opportunities to report suspicious-looking behavior.

One possibility is privatization of streets. St. Louis, for example, since the 19th century has had America's most extensive system of privately-owned and maintained residential streets. Though originally seen as a way of avoiding the city's taxing and spending limitations, one of its side effects has been crime prevention.<sup>55</sup>

#### 7) Steer children away from crime.

The evidence shows that reaching troubled children during their pre-adolescent years has the greatest effect on deterring them from becoming adult criminals.<sup>56</sup> Instilling values of respect for property, hard work, and respect for the nuclear family reduces criminal behavior. By contrast, children who become criminals often have suffered parental abuse or neglect.<sup>57</sup>

Several police forces well understand the importance of preventing crime by exposing children to its futility. "We absolutely have to target the real young kids," states Philadelphia Police Commissioner Willie Williams, adding that police and community leaders must "completely educate them about drugs, sex and how to protect themselves from family members leading them to drugs."<sup>58</sup> The Los Angeles Police Department's sponsors several youth intervention programs, such as the Jeopardy Program, in which officers visit the parents of youth involved with gangs, and DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), in which officers come into school classes, and lecture students about the dangers of drug abuse. Similarly, New York City has launched a program, "Cops and Kids," aimed at keeping children in school, improving reading skills, preventing drug addiction, and creating after-school jobs and sports programs, among other activities.<sup>59</sup> These police-sponsored programs are models for other cities.

Community groups and private institutions have established similar programs. In Washington, D.C.'s Kenilworth-Parkside Gardens, a former public housing project now owned by its tenants, the managers sponsor a program that teaches youths how to develop business skills that will keep them out of trouble. Children also are employed in project-sponsored businesses to

---

55 Oscar Newman, *Community of Interest*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 124-56.

56 Wolfgang, Thornberry, and Figlio, *From Boy to Man*.

57 According to the director of a Boston-area settlement house, the incidence of child abuse in underclass families — black and white — is "nearly 100 percent." See Morton Kondracke, "The Two Black Americas," *New Republic*, February 6, 1989, p. 19.

58 Quoted in Tom Morganthau, "Children of the Underclass," *Newsweek*, September 11, 1989, p. 24.

59 Felicia R. Lee, "Havens for Youths in Anti-Crime Plan," *New York Times*, October 11, 1990.

bake, package, and sell cookies. Working on commission, many youngsters earn up to \$45 a day.<sup>60</sup> Also, D.C. police are sponsoring nighttime basketball games to get teenagers off the streets during hours in which they might be tempted by crime, and involve them in recreation that tests their strength and athletic skills. Working with the D.C. local government, the National Basketball Players' Association, Anheuser-Busch Companies, Incorporated, and The Coca-Cola Company are acting as co-sponsors of this "Late Night Hoops" program.<sup>61</sup>

### **What Government Can Do**

The federal and state government should promote youth intervention programs. One possibility would be to use Project Head Start more frequently as a crime prevention program. Local police can work with parents of assisted children to educate them on the dangers of drugs.

Public school drug education programs should shift some of their emphasis away from students in high school and junior high schools and toward those in elementary school, since most — though not all — children that age have not yet begun to use drugs and deal in them. States and localities should establish educational tax credit voucher programs that enable low-income parents to choose private schools that provide a drug-free environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Reducing crime is a key to neighborhood revitalization and economic improvement. The evidence is clear that one of the best ways of accomplishing this is by forging resident-police programs to discourage crimes rather than simply using the police to investigate crimes after they have happened. Only when residents feel they can work closely with police will fear of crime subside.

The argument that crime is of secondary concern, and is a byproduct of poverty, misunderstands the causal relationship between poverty and crime. Tackling crime is the precondition to a successful war on poverty — tackling poverty is not the key to reducing crime.

In tackling crime, public officials at all levels must adhere to the following principles:

- ◆ A police anti-crime program in low-income neighborhoods requires maximum face-to-face communication with resident leaders.
- ◆ Crime prevention is less expensive and more effective than crime investigation.

---

60 See DiLulio, "The Impact of Inner-City Crime," p. 45.

61 Ruben Castaneda, "Hoops' Offers Sanctuary from Streets," *Washington Post*, November 29, 1990.

- ◆ No neighborhood or housing project, no matter how seemingly hopeless, can be written off. Success stories can and have happened even in the most crime-ridden neighborhoods.
- ◆ Economic development strategies to help the poor will work best when linked to areas with local crime prevention programs.
- ◆ Neighborhood space should be perceived by resident and non-resident alike as being under control of the law-abiding, not the lawless. Removal of graffiti, abandoned housing, litter, and other evidence of decay must have a high priority in municipal budgets.
- ◆ The drug culture must be eliminated. This means above all educating children and adolescents about the destructive and self-defeating nature of the drug world, and giving landlords and housing authorities the right to evict drug dealers with a minimum of impedence from misguided "civil rights" groups.

**New Relationships.** To rid poor urban neighborhoods of their criminal element, public officials at all levels must encourage the creation of new relationships between low-income resident organizations and local police forces. Central to this strategy is to give residents the confidence that they can take steps themselves to reduce crime. In this way, America may one day have a real chance of declaring victory in a war on urban poverty.

Carl F. Horowitz, Ph.D.  
Policy Analyst

*All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "NEXIS" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation's Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.*

