



Crime Drops Around the Country

By David Muhammad

Even in the economic meltdown the country has been in for the past few years, violent crime has been falling in many major cities in the country. Big cities like New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Oakland, CA and others have recorded significant drops in crime.

In May, the FBI released a study reporting that crime is down across the country. "Preliminary figures indicate that, as a whole, law enforcement agencies throughout the Nation reported a decrease of 5.5 percent in the number of violent crimes brought to their attention for 2009 when compared with figures reported for 2008," according to the FBI report.

Many social observers assume when the economy is suffering, crime will increase. The reasoning seems sound: huge unemployment rates will promote more theft and robbery, foreclosures and pink slips will drive more drug use, and overall despair will produce more crime. But that just hasn't been true.

In 2009, Washington, DC had one of the lowest homicide rates in decades. Prior to the recent Memorial Day weekend, the District was on track to have a 30 percent lower homicide rate than in the record breaking year before.

In Oakland, CA, where the city was ranked third most dangerous city in the nation for the outbreak in violence in 2008, in the year and a half since, crime has been on a downward spiral.

What is most impressive about the lower crime rates is that it is at a time when incarceration rates are also down. After more than twenty years of massive incarceration rates in America, most states are realizing that it is a far too costly and an ineffective tool to use.

Poverty and employment are critical factors in the fight against violence. Crime is not down because this isn't true. Crime has become even more concentrated in the smaller areas of the big cities that are not yet gentrified and are still depressed and crime has also fanned out to more suburbs where impoverished and undereducated former city dwellers were forced to flee due to the increased cost of living, even in historic ghettos.

There is still much speculation about why crime has been falling the past few years. But for those of us who live in certain crime riddled neighborhoods, it is hard to understand the statistics. Even as DC is having one of its safest years in history, in March there was the biggest drive by shooting in the city since the late 80s – nine were shot and four were killed.

In deep East Oakland, in Brooklyn's Brownsville neighborhood, and in Washington, DC's Southeast section of the city – a deadly mix of poverty, substandard education, easy access to drugs and guns still prevail. And there are signs that this summer may have a greater

impact than usual. Over the recent Memorial Day weekend, there were nine homicides in Baltimore and six in Washington, DC.

So overall, the news is good – violence is down throughout America. But we must remain cautious. In the most challenging neighborhoods in the country, violence still runs rampant. And if social conditions don't change, more violence is on the horizon.