

The Benefits of Grassroots, Peaceful, And Youth-led Initiatives in
Curbing Urban Violence*

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Submitted March 29, 2000

* This project was advised by Professor Daniel J. Myers as part of the Notre Dame Research Workshop on Riots and Protest. I thank Mame Hogan, Jenny Ptacin, Kimberly Berg, and Katie Bolzendahl for assistance with data collection.

INTRODUCTION

Violence sometimes seems to be an insurmountable woe of urban life, especially when the police fail to protect the citizens, or worse, are publicly viewed as the enemy. Particularly in communities where most residents are African Americans, there is a long history of mutual distrust, fear, and hostility between the police and the citizens. As a result, the authorities cannot ensure safety, and in fact are known to exacerbate tensions (Kotlowitz 1987; MacLeod 1995; Melendez 1993; Berg and Perez 1999; Bergesen 1982; McPhail, Schweingruber and McCarthy 1998). More guns, crackdowns, and other strong-arm tactics by the police do not address the source of urban violence that plagues African American communities.

At times, meaningful, cooperative partnerships between the Black community and civic authorities have attempted to quell pervasive violence (Knopf, 1970). Two such programs were the Youth Patrols, established during the upheavals in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the Nation of Islam security brigades, formed in the late 1980s to lessen the rampant violence in the housing projects of inner cities.¹ Such coalitions, while often successful attempts to pool resources and reconcile differing perspectives, have perished quickly, but almost never because the initiative failed to reduce violence. Rather, these two programs met external roadblocks; sometimes financial constraints, distrust from traditional power mediators (usually federal government or local police) or eventual disinterest in their worth once the peak of

¹ "Youth patrols" and "security brigades" are generic names I use to identify these programs in this paper. Local variants of these programs sometimes were differently named.

trouble waned (Dennis 1996). On the whole, these programs have been acclaimed for their dedication and success in creating safer environments. But with such a short existence, they have not led to long-term peace.

While the implementation, formulation, success, and philosophy of these programs was diverse, both the Youth Patrols and the Nation of Islam patrols elicited great enthusiasm from community leaders and residents, as well as local authorities. Fundamental to the short-term success of these initiatives was their commitment to peaceful means, trust in the leadership of youths, and faith in grass roots power. The basic method of operating for both organizations was to monitor tension through community patrolling. On a deeper scale, though, they sought to involve community leaders, residents, and youths in the control of their own environment, and therefore, enable a sense of stake in their community and authority over community affairs. Thus, woven though the vision of the successful programs were the twin goals of stopping violence while also addressing the social ills that created the tumult. Ideally, such programs developed trust, interdependency, and common concern between authorities and African American communities,² and the leaders of the programs acted as liaisons between the formerly clashing camps.

Paramount for the programs to be just was the implementation of concrete measures to address the circumstances that plummeted a community into violent turmoil.

² Not all "authorities" were White, of course. Several cities I examined had Black mayors, congresspersons, and assembly members. Nevertheless, there was still a rift in communication between authorities and community members.

Otherwise, such programs as the Youth Patrols and the Nation of Islam Security program could simply serve to manipulate the citizens and youth to help silence disruptive voices. Many of the programs to be discussed were created simultaneously with job training centers, anti-poverty leagues, youth activity boards, and social service programs. Thus, rather than the community patrollers acting as “Uncle Toms” or White-power pawns, they formulated constructive bilateral covenants between local and federal authorities, the private sector, and community members. Under such an arrangement, violence would lose legitimacy as the only avenue for voicing concerns or rebelling against society. Programs that ignore or fail in this necessary component will only offer a disservice to the entire community, further alienating the Black ghettos and leading to a sense of betrayal.

The final component essential for the success of grassroots, youth-led and peaceful initiatives is widespread support. Leaders of these programs serve their neighborhoods as liaisons between residents and authorities. When the patrol group loses advocacy from either party, their structure will falter and their effectiveness will wane. Furthermore, outside endorsements from governors, surrounding communities, businesses or even the federal government were paramount for the feasibility of the Youth Patrol and Nation of Islam initiatives.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to assess the effects of peaceful, grassroots, and youth-inclusive alternatives to combating urban violence, I researched the two programs: Youth Patrols and the Nation of Islam security brigades. The historical data regarding the Youth Patrols came from the archives of the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence.

This center, which operated at Brandies University from 1966-1974, gathered newspaper articles from both large and small cities on the riots of the Civil Rights/Vietnam era in order to unveil causes for the rage on city streets. In addition, the center also conducted interviews with hundreds of Black and White community leaders. From this large data set, I endeavored to find articles and interviews about the youth patrols. In doing so, I created a comprehensive set of interviews and articles about the patrols.

I was also concerned that programs effective in the 1960s may no longer work today since the scope and type of violence has changed. Thus, I sought a more recent example to increase the reliability of my findings about these kinds of efforts and chose the Nation of Islam security patrols. Preliminary research showed that, like the youth patrols, these security groups focused on peaceful means to procure community harmony, collaborated with the communities to ensure horizontal development, and incorporated youths into its framework, voice, and implementation. To match the data set I had found in the Lemberg Archives, I used various electronic search engines to locate articles regarding the Nation of Islam patrols. I located several hundred of articles discussing the patrols from over twenty cities.

THE YOUTH PATROLS

In researching the articles on the youth patrols, I found that the groups adhered to non-violent standards. Not one city complained of violent tactics from the youths. Always, the youths vowed absolutely peaceful means of calming their communities. In addition, the patrols were completely grassroots in origin; city

administrators did not initiate the youth patrol. In almost every case, the youths, community, and administrators communicated closely on the creation, vision, and goals of the patrols. Since the ideas and the youths themselves originated from the struggling neighborhood, they received respect and trust from the people.

Youths were often the primary actors in rallying support for the patrols. If not, they were at least largely consulted on the efficacy of the proposals and strongly encouraged in their efforts. And the most successful were those that were backed by the political and social machinery, thereby legitimizing their roles. In most cases, local authorities and civil leaders promised to address the communities' concerns, not just plug the violence. Thus, the youth patrols soothed their communities by acting as respected liaisons bringing word that change would arrive soon. Of course, when reviewing the devastating conditions still plaguing urban environments today, it is questionable how strong that commitment toward change from authorities really was. However, at the time, youth patrols were successful because they were suited with a promise of urban renewal. For the most part, the more dedicated to change the authorities were, the more productive the youth patrol was.

While each city was very different in its support bases and logistics (such as uniforms and behavioral protocol), the youth patrols in general were groups of young adults assembled from the troubled community in order to lessen violence when it arose. Most did this by communicating closely with civic and police authorities, acting as a channel through which the voice of the people could be heard and the concerns of the authorities could be addressed. This communication occurred in board meetings, planning sessions, and

dispersion of the youths into the streets when unrest sizzled. The most successful programs occurred when authorities regarded the youths' position in the community with respect and listened carefully to the grievances they expressed. Subsequently, the successful cities drafted blueprints for a more equitable future and attempted to act on their promises.

Background

As a rebellious mood shook hundreds of US cities in the 1960s, police and authorities were unprepared, shocked by the extent of anger and scope of participation (Baskin, Hartwig, Lewis, and McCullough. 1971). No longer could the impoverished conditions of Black communities be ignored, sidelined, and placated through sweet-talk. Black sections of cities were literally exploding in pursuit of social and political equality and their piece of the vast American wealth. Enormous tension widened the great race chasm, sometimes rendering communication between Black inner-city residents and the outside world as difficult as if they were two polarized nations.

While concerned authorities grappled with appropriate means to reach their Black-urban constituents, a semblance of revolution inflamed the cities. During a tumultuous outbreak in Tampa, Florida, which shattered that city's "pleasant pipe dream of perfect race relations" (Miami Herald 4/28/68; 11), local authorities heeded the words of Black leaders and removed the police from city streets after three days of violent destruction.

In their stead, youth patrols entered the seething city to sooth tension and address concerns. Hailed for successfully mediating the conflict, the "Tampa Technique" (Parade 7/30/67; p 4) sparked a nation-wide trend to channel the energies of youth away from violent rebellion and into productive rehabilitation partnerships. While similar

ideas had popped up in New York and Miami prior to Tampa, neither gained the national recognition of the "Tampa White Hats." Following the introduction of this technique, youth patrols began mediating conflicts in violence-ridden cities all across the country. Cities across the nation, including East El Paso, Providence, Boston, New Rochelle, Des Moines, Dayton, Pittsburgh, Miami, and Los Angeles, developed community patrols, usually wedded to a partnership with youths, to ease the tension on their streets. In this paper, a more in depth view of four cities is undertaken. These four, Tampa, Newark, Atlanta and New York most clearly exemplify the criteria needed to achieve successful patrols.

Tampa White Hats: A Risky Experiment

For years Tampa had prided itself as a congenial sunny city, immune to the racial strife sweeping the country. But, in mid-June of 1967, just as in other major cities, the Black population of Tampa, who at the time made up 60,000 out of the 350,000 residents, erupted when their threshold for inequality reached its tolerance limit. Newspapers reported that a White officer had shot and critically wounded a Black youth, alerting the police-wary sensibilities in Tampa's Black citizens. Three hours later, citywide arson, looting, and sniping kicked off three days of violence. Whites and police became immediate targets as Blacks physically showed their anger and force. Gangs of youth, the most prominent force in the melee, roamed streets, throwing firebombs and smashing windows.

Amidst the ruckus, concerned administrators, including Mayor Nick Nuccio and County Sheriff, Malcolm Beard, held meetings with Black leaders to construct a plan of action. It was soon apparent to the director of the Community Relations

Commission, a conglomerate of community voices, that one perspective was wholly absent from the dialogue: the youth. In order to rectify this neglect, the prospect of recruiting a "youth patrol," consisting of area youngsters to manage and "cool" the violence, emerged. Black leaders, including some from the local NAACP chapter and a highly respected football coach, acted on the idea by immediately canvassing the city in search of youths suitable for the patrol. It was not "choir boys" (Parade 5) they desired, but rather, ringleaders who were known and revered by other youths.

By midnight of the third day, the peacemakers, over 100 strong, were geared and ready. Donning white armbands and hats, to both serve as a uniform and a symbol of peace, the youth eagerly entered the fray. On the prior evening, many of these same youth had actually been the troublemakers. But, when asked by respected Black leaders to "do a man's job," these youths proudly embraced the opportunity. While the youths were just as frustrated as the rest of their community, they leaped at the chance to do something more constructive, for they could see that "nobody was getting anywhere" (Parade 5) through violence. Furthermore, since the sheriff heeded the Black community's request to remove the police, the youth patrol faced an enticing challenge: to prove that their neighborhood did not need the Tampa power structure controlling it. Such responsibility was a dream they championed with dedication and fervor, as they pleaded with their friends and neighbors:

*Come on, man, let's cool
it...no crowd here,
please...break it up...come
on, let's show 'em...Go on in
the house there Joe...Listen,
Whitey can be back in here*

*with his army in five minutes
if he thinks he's got a
reason...Move along, Biggy,
we had enough trouble the
last three nights...lot's of
people watching us, let's
show 'em (Parade 5)*

Orations like these sounded throughout the city as the youth patrol successfully appeased and directed their own community. Sweeping the streets in formations of three, the youths “talked the riot to death” (Parade 4), never using force or weapons to persuade the people. Unlike the batons, riot gear, and bullhorns of the police, the youths ended tension with the respect they both gave and received, as well as logical appeals to reason. In case of trouble that they could not handle, the youths relied on local headquarters, where they could notify adult leaders, and if necessary, the police. Through this organized design, the youth proudly served the interests of the entire community and brought their cohort’s voice to the decision-making process. Within an hour of their arrival, the stormy climate in Tampa calmed. While scattered incidents of rock and bottle throwing and small fires tested the smooth balance, the youth patrol’s word was largely respected. At one point, news of a “knifing” and crowd build-up was reported to the police chief, who restrained the urge to deploy forces until he confirmed the rumor. In fact, the White Hats had not lost control. Crowds were gathering, but only because there was a misguided flock of police patrol cars clogging the streets. As soon as the police were ordered out, the White Hats dispersed the crowd, sounding strong evidence of their competence.

A large part of this successful network depended on the support of the whole community, including police,

government, businesses, and Whites. Furthermore, the promise from authorities that the youths’ efforts would not be in vain, that the needs of the Black community would be main-staged in the future, was an essential part of the deal. As the president of the Tampa branch of the NAACP prodded “the cause of the trouble has not gone away” (New York Times 6/16/67), though the riots were finished.

Police and community support was ample during the riot, though some persons were skeptical of such an unconventional endeavor. During meetings with the Community Relations Commissions, diverse opinions were solicited so that each perspective was adequately heard. The police chief provided uniforms. Adults in the community simultaneously filtered through streets during the event, to support and legitimize youths. But, the most profound display of advocacy was the fact that the mayor and police department agreed to surrender police and National Guard patrol, trusting the youths with full reign to prove their ability.

No matter how trusting the authorities proved to be, the ultimate test of its reliability and commitment to the Black-urban crises are the promises it kept after the youth patrol maintained its end of the bargain. If power-bodies vow to exchange less police interference and stronger social service programs for cooperation in the community, youths will promptly serve their community in the name of change. However, when such intentions do not accompany the formation of the youth patrol, the program serves only as an exploitative extension of the despised White agenda, where the youth’s position in the community is the marionette of the government.

In the case of Tampa, a large part of the youth patrol’s success was that promises

were kept. Mayor Nuccio did not stray from his word in vowing to remove all police patrols not regularly in the streets. Furthermore, even when the knifing rumor reached headquarters, Mayor Nuccio remained calm and confident in the youth patrols, keeping his word that he would only deploy police when the youths themselves requested back up. As a final show of gratitude and respect, the Mayor and Governor, following the inspirational actions of the youth, offered the young leaders framed citations of honor, jobs for a few, and words of congratulations and appreciation:

By your action you have integrated yourselves into the leadership of your community. I do not mean the Negro community- I mean the total community. (Governor Claude Kirk's speech in riot-torn part of town; Washington Post 6/20/67)

Words like these properly credit the youth as the primary players in their assertive work to better their community. However, in a statement ringing with the White-centric flavor of the times, the governor blemished the compliment by unabashedly triumphing the usefulness of the patrol as a means to ensure the positive White opinions of the Black community, rather than healing the dejection and adversity of the Blacks themselves:

The Negro citizen on the scene, backed up by the necessary restraint of the law, can be most effective in preventing vandals from outbreaks of lawlessness which turn white against

black (Washington Post 6/20/67).

This gaping flaw in the description of the spirit of youth patrols can be attributed to the governor's absence at the multiple planning meetings, where the community's Black voice was strong and prominent. Yet, Mayor Nuccio, who made ardent attempts to understand and comply with this Black perspective, did not hold such a view, ensuring, along with the Commission of Community Relations, that community improvements rewarded the Black citizens' willingness to subside violence. Following the events, newly installed lights brightened the streets, playground equipment was installed in parks, 75 new jobs were allocated to Blacks, job training sessions were conducted by a commissioner from the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, several businesses joined the effort, and the process for blueprinting two new parks was hastened. Furthermore, despite the neighborhood peace, the White Hats were still commissioned by the city to advertise job opportunities to local youth, organize activities for children, notify authorities of broken equipment at playgrounds, and mediate concerns between the authorities and the citizens. Simply preventing further violence in Tampa was not the goal of the youth patrols, as the governor seemed to think. In their own words:

We managed to stop a riot. Now we gotta take away the guys' reasons for ever starting another one. (Parade 5)

Such commitment did not vanish once new leaders arrived. Mayor Dick Grego, superceding Nuccio, "has spent more time on Negro problems than anything else"

(Miami Herald 4/28/68; 12). Personally visiting the Black ghettos, he assessed concerns and needs through direct communication, a technique pioneered by Nuccio. Certainly, conditions were still largely unfavorable a year after the youth patrols won over the streets. But, Black leaders say that since that time, attitudes of business and civic leaders have greatly transformed, as they now see the import of Black community relations and equality. Perhaps, one hopes, Tampa “can provide a small example to the rest of the country”. Yet race relations in the late 1960s were oversimplified and still shrouded by a White-Euro world-view, as seen in the gross understatement of Mayor Greco that “there has been some neglect in the past” regarding the Black community. What is apparent, however, is that, despite a residual racist attitude laced in the statements of the governor and mayor Greco, youth patrols served a beneficial role in Tampa’s race relations.

As the Black community raged through the streets, demanding its needs to be addressed, the youth patrols emerged as liaisons. They saw and trusted in a system that had never served their interests equally because they hoped for the chance to gain a voice through legitimate mechanisms. To the authorities’ credit, the youth were not to be disillusioned. The covenant forged between the once polar groups was mediated by the youth.

Newark: Total Community Involvement

Mayor Addonizio did not just brace for upheaval when the news of Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination hit the streets of Newark. Along with a consortium of community members and leaders, he spent hours planning ways to keep his constituents safe. Since Newark was known for the worst racial riot in the summer of 1967 and

since Dr. King had visited the city the week prior to his death, most thought Newark was a sure hot-spot for trouble (Cook 1). Yet a solid community-wide effort to curb violence and work for peace overpowered most impulses for destruction.

Late on April 4th 1968, Newark began to crackle with signs of rage. Sprees of looting, arson, and window breaking swept the streets, but were relatively limited. Youth patrols worked for four days, greatly relaxing their city. But on April 9th, after the patrols had been removed because of the widespread stillness of the city, massive fires drove hundreds of Black families from their homes. Just as the funeral service for Dr. King processed in Atlanta, Newark burned. Over 50 stores were looted and 300 windows smashed. Throughout the night, 190 fires were reported. About 300 families now without homes flooded the city. But a focused and dedicated core of leaders, Black and White, old and young, authorities and common citizens, salvaged this city, which could have collapsed under total destruction. By April 10th, after over 16 citywide meetings, Newark citizens were unleashing their anger in boardrooms, rather than calamitous fury on the streets. Violence ruled the streets of Newark only when the youth patrols were off duty.

The anti-poverty organization known as the United Community Corporation, first mobilized its members on April 5th through inclusive meetings, inviting the mayor, the police commissioner, Black and White militant groups, labor leaders, businesses, and concerned community residents. At one point, youths that were the primary looters and arsonists in the streets stormed into a UCC meeting, complaining of police brutality. When Addonizio toured the streets to inspect the complaints, he ordered police off the streets, and allowed the UCC youth to create a patrol, similar to the one in

Tampa to sooth the violence on the streets. Along with adult patrols, the youths were granted full liberty in combating the terror in their community. Equipped with “I Care” buttons, Black mourning armbands, and red UCC badges on their shirt pockets, as many as 600 area youths intermixed with rowdy crowds, cajoling the restless with words and fliers:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has lain down his life for every man. The greatest tribute that we in Newark can pay our ‘fallen warrior’ is to reaffirm our belief in the goals for all humanity for which Dr. King labored (Newark News 4/7/68).

Coupled with the argument that the city’s people should endorse nonviolence was the argument that Blacks in Newark were slowly becoming the majority. Youths urged their friends and neighbors to stay composed, patiently waiting for their chance to run the city:

Stay off the streets. Understand. If you riot the Man will freeze the government. Newark is your city. Keep it. Don’t do what the Man wants you to do. He wants you to riot. Don’t. Black people are in a position to take this city by vote. Don’t blow it... (New York Post 4/11/68).

Tactics such as these convinced most Newark citizens to abide by the law and create peace in their neighborhoods. Youths were aided throughout the process by peace vigils, a massive “march for understanding”

involving 25,000 from all around the city, including the suburbs, and the total cooperation and support of the mayor, the United Community Corporation, and the local militant groups. When they asked that riot gear and weapons be removed from police that remained in streets, the mayor granted their request. Furthermore, the mayor’s office conceded an extended curfew and broadcast radio messages to legitimize the youth. Embedded in this network of support, the youth patrols knew that any problems could be siphoned into the 24 hour hotlines at both the UCC headquarters and the mayor’s rumor control center. Even more essential for their validity and advocacy in the community were the militant factions who became prominent allies, praising the youths’ efforts, and echoing their sentiments, “we didn’t get anything out of last year’s riot and we lost a lot of friends” (Newark News 4/6/68). Ironically enough, these “militants”, visible players in the Black community, matched the youth’s efforts by mingling with and coaxing the citizens into peace.

Likely, such community-wide efforts could not have occurred if Mayor Addonizio *ordered* his constituents to follow his plan. Instead, having experienced the volatility of mob action from last year’s riot, the Mayor vowed to consider and heed the perspectives of those who work closest with the community. No action was taken by the mayor without consulting the UCC. In the words of the UCC public affairs officer:

This is an historic precedent. This kind of action has not occurred in any other city. It demonstrates a coalition group working in concert as an effective force. (Star-Ledger 4/11/68).

Thus, unlike in other cities, the youth patrols

were created through the contributions of all community factions, allowing youths to design their own plans and ensuring that the Black community had the prominent voice in the decision-making arena.

However, as noted in Tampa, capping the explosiveness of the Black community without addressing the reasons for their angry mood would only buy time and likely lend to greater fury in the future. In 1968, Newark's leaders did not falter in pursuing the full contract. After the youths so successfully quieted the city, plans for a teen center, heightened emergency relief programs, 1,000 new job opportunities, 1700 spots in training programs, and better education were all compensations, however rudimentary, to overcome some of the vast inequalities Newark's Black community endured.

Unfortunately, as with all the youth patrols, funding and support diminished. A federal grant was denied to the youth patrols at the advice of the state's governor, even though the proposal emphasized that the patrols would have no weapons and function only so as to "maintain a constant and intimate contact with the community to aid the police department in the prevention of crimes and violence" (Christian Science Monitor 6/21/68). Just as in Tampa, New Jersey's governor was absent from all the UCC meetings during the city's turbulence, had no contact with the city's youth, and thus deemed the program dangerous because of its ties to militant factions--even though these very militants were praised for their work with the successful youth patrols. While the Newark youth patrol experience is witness to the wonderful success such initiatives have in curbing urban violence, it also reflects what can happen when outside powers get control. The governor denied the proposals for future activities of the youth patrol, making the group virtually

defunct. Today when one looks at the violence occurring in Newark, one wonders what contributions the youth advisory group, thirty years strong, could have realized in the city.

Atlanta and New York: Failed patrols

While it is clear that the tight communication in Tampa and Newark across race and power lines, as well as the awakened commitment of the community to the acute needs of Black citizens, enabled the youth patrols to work with pride, conviction, and success, patrols in other cities failed without this community and trust base.

In late June 1967, a crowd of Atlanta Blacks assembled to convey grievances to police. Earlier in the week, a boy suspected of shoplifting was shot in a scuffle with police, amplifying the Blacks' sense of persecution. When Stokely Carmichael, militant leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was arrested when he refused police orders at a rally for the slain youth, trouble was ignited all over Atlanta. Two hundred and fifty people attended a meeting to discuss revenge tactics. Carmichael urged Blacks "to take to the streets and force the police department to work until they fall on their backs" (Kerner Commission 1968). Hastily, Georgia Senator, Leroy Johnson, formed a "Youth Corps." Reflecting the influence of Tampa, the Atlanta youth wore white armbands and infiltrated incensed mobs. Despite their efforts, however, angry Blacks mobbed a shopping mall where the boy had been shot. Bottles, bricks, and rocks flew everywhere, rendering the powerless youth patrol helpless. Making matters even worse, the police fired guns in the air to try to disperse the crowd. The Black protestors contend that the police started firing at them when a firebomb went off near the crowd. In either case, the shootings and/or firebombs killed

one person and left several injured.

For the yearling program of youth patrols, such a complete failure must have been devastating. Their presence did nothing to ease the ferocity of the mob. Atlanta's Youth Corps was demoted in principal, though the Kerner Commission credits the Corps' efforts with improved community-police relations. Yet, the Youth Corps did not fail because grassroots, youth-led, and peaceful initiatives are inherently deficient. On the contrary, this patrol was not a grassroots organization, even though the youths did hail from the community. Atlanta's Youth Corps was not created from the community, but rather at the mandate of a Senator. While this particular Senator was Black, he did not have a grasp of the mood in Atlanta's Black communities.

Much of Atlanta wanted calm, deeply regretting the horrible killing of one of their own. Over 1,000 citizens and leaders signed a petition urging nonviolence and understanding, while also listing the demands of Black citizens. However, an important faction of Atlanta did not subscribe to peaceful measures. Led by militants of SNCC, like Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, many Atlantans rallied violently, denouncing the youth patrols as traitors, saying they "are selling their Black brothers out" (Washington Post 6/21/67). Without the support of the Black community, youth patrols were powerless because so much of their success is rooted in the respect and trust they receive from their neighborhoods. Leadership in Atlanta failed to meet with all factions of their community in a moment of great crisis. Many citizens of the city demonstrated their opinions: some through petitions and others through violence, evidencing the fact that the desire for a voice was ready and strong. However, rather than work *with* divided factions, Atlanta's administrators made decisions *for* them. So

when people demanded answers regarding police behavior, they were met with arrests. When militants denounced the implementation of youth patrols, their warnings of failure were ignored, putting the lives of those youth in danger. And, finally, advocates of nonviolence had to brandish their grievances in a petition, rather than a formalized committee or hearing, unlike what had occurred in Tampa and Newark. For those who say militants cannot negotiate or enter into coalitions with the broader society, one has to only point to the dedication of Newark as a prime counter-example.

There is a different story of defeat in New York. Mayor Lindsay, much like Mayor Nuccio and Addonizio, believed in the importance of consulting the marginalized Black sector of the city. And, much like Tampa's Community Relations Commission and Newark's United Community Corporation, New York had its Urban Task Force, which sought to "bring together community people," including antipoverty workers, merchants, neighborhood organizations, heads of local social outreach organizations, the foreman of the sanitation district, head of the welfare office, and the captains of local police and fire departments (New York Times 7/10/68). Through all the diversity of these voices, New York hoped that every citizen was at least somewhat represented in decision-making.

Through the Task Force, a youth corps was developed in 1965, consisting of local Black and Puerto Rican teens who interacted with youths all over the city, discussing problems, organizing ball games, and notifying police of danger zones. Eighteen local branches were spread across the city, each advised by a high-ranking city administrator. They worked sometimes in conjunction and sometimes alone,

exchanging advice and experience, but also focusing on the unique problems of each particular district. In order to ensure that the citizenry is safe and represented in city affairs, the youth Task Force acted as an intermediary between authorities and the Black community.

Crucial to the success of the program was the city's dedication to improving the conditions that cause riots. The youth corps acted, not only as "flying squads of troubleshooters" (New York Times 7/10/68), but also as teachers, coaches, antipoverty workers, and planners of recreational activities and cultural programs.

To this end, local businesses had donated over one million dollars. This youth patrol was not created for a specific event, like they were in Tampa, Newark, and Atlanta. Rather, its philosophy was a year round attempt to keep Black citizens cared for and connected. It is clear that the Urban Task Force cared for the youth, as they were given job training and pay checks for their service to the community, versus just being a cheap way for the city to avoid a large private security bill.

However, despite this commendable effort, there was a piece missing: the police were not integrated into the effort. Following the King assassination, trouble brewed in East Harlem. After one night of riots and swift repression by the hated Tactical Police Force (TPF), East Harlem was not quiet and tired, but better characterized by escalated vehemence. Outraged at the treatment they endured at the whim of the police, the streets raged. Mobs of youth geared up for battle on the city streets. A positive outcome seemed possible when Police Commissioner Leary listened attentively to the youth patrols and consented to contain the TPF on the second night of the riot. Jubilantly, the peace patrols dressed in their uniforms, handed to them by

the police, and marched off to duty. As a crowd of youths attempted to loot and burn a jewelry store, the peacemakers announced the good news of the police's cooperation and successfully convinced the mob of their victory. Everyone jubilantly dispersed into the streets to head home, but were cut off on all sides by armored vehicles brimming with officers from the Tactical Police Force. Feeling the Commissioner had betrayed them, the youth patrols became riot-leaders, rather than the peace activists they had been moments before. They were the first to lash out at the TPF, as they threw their white hats, formerly the very symbol of peace, at the police cars.

Apparently, communication had broken down and the head of the force was not notified properly of the stand down order. Whatever the reason, the youths were embarrassed and angry feeling they had been duped, once again, by the White power structure. While the New York experiment was a success, broken communication eventually led to failure. Peace was balanced entirely on trust and communication, but when this foundation was fractured, the situation may have become even worse than if the patrols never been formed.

The experiment of the New York Youth Patrols did not die with this negative event. In fact, the program successfully continued until about 1975. Though the riots across the country had diminished, violence had not. Molding itself to new urban problems, the New York Youth Patrols moved to the relatively new housing projects in Brooklyn. There they continued their role as liaisons between the community and police, transmitting calls back and forth and relaying concerns and requests. Furthermore, they were a strong presence of peace and respect in a community plagued by poverty. They escorted residents around the city and chatted with disturbed youths.

Salvaged by the commitment from Mayor Lindsay and the Urban Task Force, the Youth Patrols overcame the early troubles in East Harlem. The city learned from their mistake: even if a program is grassroots and peaceful, it can fall apart if any power-mediator in the community is dissociated from the program. The relationship between a community patrol and local authorities must be based on trust, communication, and widespread support if grassroots, peaceful, and youth-led initiatives in checking urban violence are to succeed.

Youth Patrols: An Untapped Resource, An Ignored Phenomenon

As cities across the United States succumbed to riots in the late 1960s, communities were ripped up and divided. Black America had reached its threshold, at which point it would no longer accept marginalization in American society. Many Blacks chose violence to express their grievances because other means were so often clogged with racism, bureaucracy, and apathy. But many others, including youths, patiently sought peaceful avenues toward change and rejuvenation. The youth patrols did not need to crush violence with force, for they depended on the respect and understanding they had in the community. Their experiences demonstrate that peace cannot be ordered from the outside or from the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Rather, they must be grassroots in nature, design, and implementation. Traditionally, measures to deflate urban turmoil are philosophically grounded in principles of forceful tactics, top-echelon decision-making, and exclusively adult perspectives. The Youth Patrols proved that grassroots, peace, and youth work best in disenfranchised communities, but only against a backdrop of widespread support and a strong commitment to future change from authorities.

NATION OF ISLAM SECURITY BRIGADES

Even though youth patrols worked in the late 1960s, such programs are not necessarily feasible in the gang and drug warfare of inner cities today. Sadly, much of the promises by city officials in the 1960s for better jobs and housing for Blacks were either forgotten or unworkable since most of the same conditions exist today. But, at the turn of the century the violence resulting from these conditions is of a different brand. No longer are whole communities rushing the streets in protest. Rather, most violence stems from gang culture, whereby youths feeling rejected from society, seek camaraderie, subsistence, and affirmation with other youths (MacLeod 1987; Massey and Denton 1993).

Under the guidance of Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam (NOI) has thrust itself into the national spotlight, both for its rave successes like the Million Man March and the controversy surrounding anti-Semitic behaviors in the organization. Both of these events played into the trajectory of the Nation's attempt to intercede in urban violence problems. In the end, it was not the capability of the Nation's security brigades to contain violence that brought failure. On the contrary, almost all failed because the Nation of Islam was viewed as too controversial³ for politicians to feel comfortable allocating federal funds in their name.

The saga began when in 1988, the Nation of Islam bid for and won a contract to provide security in one of Washington DC's worst housing projects. Within the next six years, the Nation of Islam security companies splintered into four predominant

³ One Dallas patrol also failed because the NOI men assaulted four potential shoplifters, straying from the normally peaceful means.

firms, New Life Self Development, NOI Security Agency, X-Men Security, Inc, and Nation of Islam Security Support Group. Throughout the country, local housing authorities, including ones in Baltimore, New York, Chicago, Dayton, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo, NY, contracted over \$20 million of federal funds from the office of Housing and Urban Development to hire these firms. Reports from Washington raved about the firms' proficiency in curbing urban violence. What most cities did not prophesy when they contracted with the firms was the cascade of political fallout that would prevent the completion of the agreements.

The main problem with the firms was their affiliation with the Nation of Islam. Shrouded in a history of anti-Semitism, NOI was strongly opposed by the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith, a strong lobby in American politics. Fixated on the dilemma of funding hate groups, Congressman Peter King launched a battle that eventually led to a hearing before the House Banking Subcommittee. All NOI security firm contracts were subsequently deemed in violation of the federal laws that mediate the process of federal contracting. Since the firms were awarded money through the HUD department, they were subject to a series of regulations.

Among the rules violated by the firms, according to prosecutors, were proselytizing and recruiting by a religious organization, an infraction of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause which prevents federal funds for the use of promoting one religion over another. Another law, developed in the Civil Rights Act and carried out by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, was the discrimination in employment practices, whereby any guard in the NOI firms supposedly had to declare allegiance to the

Nation's religion. Though a HUD investigation revealed that out of 1,000 residents of public housing where the NOI patrolled, a very limited number reported either proselytizing or employment discrimination, Peter King and the ADL staunchly insisted that such findings were peripheral and invalid due to the small scope and complacent attitude of Housing Secretary, Henry Cisneros. Finally, when any group is in negotiations for federal contracts, there is a precise protocol for the bidding process. In many cities, local housing authorities were so eager to hire the Nation's security firms that they circumvented some key bidding regulations. In some cases the city would not advertise to other firms or hire NOI even though they were not the lowest bidders. In other cases, the housing authorities counseled NOI on how best to present their case to HUD, while the other firms went unadvised.

While some of these broken regulations were serious offenses, others were trumped-up political chips used to conquer the NOI. However, the security patrols were a successful answer to violence, that, as a grassroots, peaceful, and youth-inclusive initiative, had important parallels to the youth patrols. While many factions were infuriated that government money was spent "to subsidize a hate group" (Congressional Hearing, Federal Document Clearing House 3/2/95), the overshadowed import of the experience was that almost everyone agreed that the patrols were victorious in creating safer neighborhoods for the nation's inner cities (New York Daily News 10/18/96). The Nation of Islam experience clearly supported the notion that when peaceful, grassroots and youth-inclusive initiatives are widely supported and promoters of change, violence can be greatly reduced.

In all its endeavors in public housing projects, NOI championed peaceful means to

stopping violence. They believed that Black-America had endured enough violence. The Nation wanted a new model, one of respect, dignity, and trust. Furthermore, the Nation is well known as an organization that understands the fury in the hearts of the nation's Black citizenry (The Jerusalem Report 6/26/97; The Washington Post 7/9/94; The Christian Science Monitor 11/17/94; The Economist 4/1/95). In planning the implementation of the security forces, the NOI included, in every city, the Nation's, the tenants', and the authorities' visions. In addition, youth were often targeted as assistant patrols or given full time jobs on the force.

But NOI did not just want to squelch the violence without attending to the massive poverty that urban Blacks face. Rather, the Nation's champions self-reliance and subsistence and, above all, empowerment for African Americans. Black men, in particular, salvage pride through the message of the Nation. One prisoner credits the NOI for making him feel "like a person of worth more than any other time in his life" (Christian Science Monitor 5/20/96). Thus, the best interests of the people they serve are central to the Nation of Islam's motivation to patrol the crime-ridden sections of Black neighborhoods. As one astute resident pointed out, "Irish guys from the suburbs are not going to solve urban problems; they have to be solved from the inside out" (New York Daily News 9/27/96).

It seems, based on the above synopsis, that the Nation may provide a workable solution to the terror in public housing. At the same time, controversy reigns because many are unwilling to fund a group with a public record of hate. The other side to this issue is that, as many Black public housing tenants have complained, White America ignores the grave problems in the Black community. And Whites' response

to a potential solution is to squelch it in its infancy. Are there any other groups in the US that charter the same respect from urban Blacks that the Nation does? Can we note how successful this program is, but insert another group into the space that must be vacated by a "hate group"? Finally, can the Nation of Islam find a new identity in deracialized beliefs and politics?

New York: Politicized Controversy

In January of 1992, New York housing authorities contracted a security deal with the X-Men Security Company to patrol the city's beleaguered housing projects. Two years later, the guards appealed to their local assemblyman, Jules Polonetsky, for extra assistance. Not only did Polonetsky deny help, he also launched what was to become the first battle against a Nation of Islam security company.

By September of 1996, New York authorities canceled the contract with the company under pressure from Governor Pataki and assemblyman Polonetsky who claimed that such a partnership "goes against all things that a state contract specifies are forbidden" (New York Times 10/2/94). Interestingly enough, Polonetsky stated that the security patrols perform extraordinarily well at reducing crime. Understandably, he could not justify supporting a hate group just because they are effective. He rhetorically wonders just because "Mussolini made the trains run on time, does that make Fascism an acceptable evil?" (New York Times 9/13/96).

Whether or not these contracts violated federal laws, the fundamental question of this paper is, do grass roots, peaceful, youth-led initiatives benefit the traditional law enforcement mechanisms in reducing violent crime? Tenants at the Ocean Towers in Coney Island would have enthusiastically say they do. For years,

residents have “watched police drive the other way” (New York Times 7/12/92) when drug dealers terrorize the project buildings. But, when the unarmed Nation of Islam patrols entered their gates poor urban Blacks from New York clung to the organization that speaks for them and with them. The Nation of Islam security guards “wield a weapon that often eludes the police in Black neighborhoods: respect” (New York Times 1/6/92). Dressed in commanding suits and bow ties, the guards greet residents at their entryways with friendly salutations and meaningful conversation, developing a prominent and approachable position in the community that enhances the honor already bestowed upon them. This deep rooted respect, not just for the Nation itself, but also for the individual guards, resulted in a 50% increase in occupancy, a 30% decrease in violent crime, and not one dead body since 1993 (New York Daily News 9/27/96). One tenant lauds the Nation’s efforts, saying

We don’t have bars over our windows anymore, we are not caged animals...[if they leave, it] may be sentencing a whole building to death (New York Daily News 9/27/96)

Unlike the youth patrols, the Nation of Islam did not always implement the younger generations into their design. In the case of Ocean Towers, there is not much indication that youths were an integral part of the security brigade, though many articles do mention that the peacemakers were very young. Regardless, while youth would be a great way for the X-Men to extend their inclusiveness and outreach, they were successful at curbing youthful crime through the respect they gave and received by being strong role models for the youth.

Just as seen in the youth patrols of

Atlanta and New York, when the whole community fails to support the patrol, by donating resources and aid, the patrol will falter. Here too, as the politicians abandoned the project, local authorities could not sustain the effort. Sheila Boyd, director of the Tenants Association, angrily berated the policies of the politicians:

It seems that King and Polonetsky are just against Farrakhan and what he represents. This has nothing to do with the safety of the residents here...(New York Daily News 11/7/95).

But the predicament of the Nation of Islam patrols is much more complicated than it first appears. Funding "hate" groups is a serious problem for our democracy. On the other hand, it is unjust for the government to ignore the horrific problems of the inner city and then pounce on the first people who have tried successfully to ease the troubles. Clearly, at least in New York, the Nation partially solved a problem that has so long baffled the country. To simply oust them without offering to forge a new program, implementing the Nation’s viable methods and venerated voice, is a neglectful travesty against the Black urban dwellers.

Baltimore: Contract Technicalities

Baltimore public housing entered the 1990s plagued by treacherous conditions, including “gun toting drug dealers and squatters...and tenants [who] feared for their lives and kept their doors closed” (The Washington Post 1/28/94). “Sweeping” the buildings to rid them of crime and drug coves, fix maintenance problems, evict tenants without leases and address residents’ needs, the Baltimore police force cleared the way for the Nation of Islam security patrols.

Though such sweeps cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, the housing authorities are confident that such measures are cost cutting in the long term. As far as security, these sweeps laid the groundwork for a solid community support system for the Nation of Islam patrols: it was not just the Nation left to its own devices to create safe havens for city residents. Rather, various community agencies and institutions physically aided the patrols through this thorough preparation.

Following the examples of other cities, the Baltimore Housing Authority hired the Nation of Islam Security Agency for \$2.8 million to guard ten of its largest and most dangerous buildings. Baltimore was not disappointed as crime dropped radically. The police department recorded a 50% plummet in serious crime at Flaghouse Court, one of the housing projects guarded by the new security, as well as a 44% drop in major crime throughout all public housing buildings after the Nation arrived. As one resident aptly noted:

It's not Tombstone Territory around here right now. It was before and if somebody else [police or a different security firm] comes back here it will be again. (The New York Times 3/4/94).

In a city where authorities had once brought in an armored tank to quell a gang shoot-out, the peaceful ways of the Nation were a welcome change. Rather than the guns and force of police, the NOISA patrols, much like the X-Men of New York, reduced violence through respect. One particular resident who whole-heartedly admonishes the Nation's message, nonetheless appreciates that "they understand what we're feeling, that a Black man is made to feel like the lowest thing a person can be on this

earth" (The Boston Globe 2/20/94). NOISA did not just earn respect because of their generic reputation nation-wide. The patrollers relied on their message of nonviolence, cleanliness, and politeness to earn favor with the community.

Yet, as the political debate over the Nation's business transactions with the federal government heated up in Congress under the direction of Peter King, Baltimore's future with NOISA protection became highly uncertain. Henry Cisneros, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development at the time, ordered an all out investigation on the Baltimore Housing Authorities' bidding practice with the Nation. It was revealed that, against federal regulations, the Nation of Islam Security Agency had been awarded extra points in bidding because of proven ability to do the job. Competitor firm Wells Fargo claims they were not informed of this edge, and lost unfairly, even though they offered the job for a million dollars cheaper. HUD successfully ordered the cancellation of the BHA and NOISA security contract.

Tenants shouted their protests and leaders pondered the true intentions of HUD. President of the Baltimore resident advisory board lamented that:

I just feel terrible. Since [NOISA] has been in place, everything has changed and everyone in Baltimore knows that. The buildings are safe, and they're clean. The [NOISA] people are decent, respectable people. They are role models for the children. They show you don't need weapons to do a job; its all in the way you talk and approach people (The Washington Post 11/10/95).

Countering HUD spokesman Alex Sachs comment that “our concerns were fairness to the bidders”, Baltimore Housing Commissioner recalls that the “original purpose of this was people were dying every day” (The Washington Post 11/10/95). Mayor Kurt Schmoke echoes the great regret of the city by saying, “This is tremendously disappointing to me, we do not [end the contract] voluntarily” (New York Times 11/10/95).

In both Baltimore and New York, the Nation of Islam proved that it could successfully quell project violence without weapons. Working with each city's tenant associations, the Nation forged an atmosphere of peace and respect according to the will and needs of the people. Yet, outside forces, particularly politicians, grappled with the paradox before them: How to allow federal legitimizing of a controversial, perhaps even racist, organization. These politicians won their case in Congress by magnifying contract details and employment discrimination. While these violations, by law, were enough to bury the Nation's security efforts, the politicians missed a fundamental lesson in the process. Though they promised to redress the woes of the public housing communities, they actually sought a return to old ways. In both New York and Baltimore, they ordered the hiring of armed private security firms. These top-down and forceful measures have proven their inability in the past. None of the politicians who tore apart the Nation's security empire looked into how a similar organization could be assembled in the Nation's stead. Not only was there a lesson to be learned from the successful programs, like New York, Baltimore, Chicago⁴, and

⁴ After the Congressional hearings that disbanded the NOI from receiving federal

Washington DC, but also from those cities in which the Nation's security failed of its own accord. One such example is Los Angeles.

Los Angeles: Ineffective Alone

After the riots in 1992, LA was one of the most tense and divided cities in the nation. Violence, particularly between its infamous gangs the Crips and Bloods, ruled inner-city streets, terrorizing parents and children. Tenants of the Holiday Venice public housing projects in Oakwood, had always had a “bitter and angry feeling” (Times Mirror: 2/22/90) toward their housing managers. They felt that basic needs were neglected. Regina Hyman, head of the Tenants Action Committee, berated the authorities for total failure to protect the complex's citizens. Therefore, the Board of Directors of the city, the City Attorney, City Manager, and acting Police Chief met with leading community members, including tenants and representatives from the Black Male Forum, the American Friends Service Committee, the Pasadena Community Information Center, the Nation of Islam, and the Urban League. With all voices properly represented, the dialogue ensued. By September of 1992, after months of petitions and “mediation sessions” (Times Mirror: 12/22/91) between tenants and authorities, the housing managers and police board agreed to hold a hearing for a contract with the Nation of Islam security forces. Two weeks later, despite outside opposition, the tenants rejoiced at their victory to be protected by the Nation's gray-suited, bow-tied security forces.

Since community leaders led the

contracts, Rockwell Gardens, a Chicago public housing site, did learn something from the experience. They began “tenant patrols”, whereby concerned citizens took the place of the Nation's guards.

Nation's approval and designed the security guards role, decision-making power had been rooted in the people since the beginning. This process of consulting the tenants did not subside after the initial design was made. Rather, the "community impact team," consisting of representatives from various city agencies and local groups, were trained to collaborate together in order to consult with the Nation's team and assist them in cleaning up the streets and reducing crime. As with the Youth Patrols, the Nation's security brigades could not succeed without active support from the community.

With the aid of the community impact team as well as a "multi-agency" effort to wash out crime, the Nation of Islam was headed for success in Los Angeles by January of 1993.

To counter the seemingly formidable gang scene, the Nation emphasized ministry to alienated groups of youths. In fact, former members of the most dangerous gangs helped the Nation police hot spots, encouraging youths to find another way to voice their problems and establish a truce. Favoring a "nonconfrontational approach" (Times Mirror: 12/27/92), the Nation met with gangs in a spirit of common understanding, whereby the youths explained their role and the Nation countered with alternatives. They asked for cooperation from the youths is bettering the community. As seen in the 1960's calls for youth support in the Youth Patrol programs, the youths were eager to protect their neighborhoods, if given a functional and agreeable alternative to gangs.

Much as they approached the gangs, NOI security guards greeted community members with respect, escorting them across the complex, introducing themselves cheerfully, and generally bringing a peaceful presence to an area buried in violence for so long. As in New York and Baltimore, many

factions who had doubted the efficacy of unarmed security guards underestimated the power of respect and trust. For a community so long ignored in mainstream America, these virtues were dear. In the words of Daniel X, a prominent NOI spokesman,

We don't come in like gang-busting cops with shotguns and billy clubs. We give our people respect and love and wherever we go we teach.
(Times Mirror: 12/21/91)

When drug dealers did not heed this understanding of mutual respect, the Nation guards maintained their commitment to peace. One afternoon when a drug dealer threatened a guard, the NOI marched one hundred uniformed members through the complex to show their strength and solidarity as a power-body to be respected. Such showings were enough to comfort the residents and dissuade the drug dealers from colliding with the NOI.

And it worked. In the Holiday Venice buildings crime dropped from an average of thirty-two reported incidents per month, to eight. One tenant who felt safe enough to let her children play outside after the Nation arrived said, "You can really see the difference" (Times Mirror: 12/27/92).

Yet, by August of 1993 the managers fired the Nation of Islam for failing to curb drug dealing in the area. To prove this failure, the managers presented videotapes to the housing authorities, which supposedly showed negligence on the part of the NOI guards. Despite ardent efforts to include youths, to develop the program from the grassroots, and to adhere to peace, the Los Angeles experiment with the Nation of Islam patrols appeared to fail.

From this "failure," as in the others

there are many lessons to learn. Above all, this is not evidence that grassroots, peaceful, and youth-inclusive alternatives to curbing violence do not work. In this case, there are many other factors involved. For one, crime did decrease, but not up to the expectations of local authorities. Prior to the arrival of NOI, local police threatened to fire Alliance Management for neglect of the Holiday Venice Apartments. Conditions were so horrific that police ordered around the clock patrols of the building. Drugs and crime at Venice had been rampant and neglected for years. To reverse this trend, twenty-four hour security was recommended by law enforcement agencies. When NOI security descended on the Venice complex, their job was to overcome years of neglect, but only on seven-hour shifts per day. They were not afforded the necessary resources for completing an astronomical task. Though they attempted to subvert this handicap by alternating their shifts in order to confuse criminals, they were still not able to control events in off-hours. Furthermore, whereas police and other security firms were allowed years to deal with crime issues in the area, NOI was judged as incompetent less than a year after they began patrolling. Despite some wonderful results, they were discounted before ever getting a chance to prove their worth. Many residents claimed that part of the problem was poor relations with the police. Regardless, NOI succeeded better than any other security group in the past, including the police themselves. Yet, politics sunk their chances for long-term change.

Politics, in this case, was multi-faceted. Not only did the police and housing authority fail to give NOI the proper support, but also the residents of the Oakwood area were skeptical of this new force in their neighborhood. Oakwood is a rapidly gentrifying community. While the

NOI is highly revered in the Black community, it is feared and suspect in others. Jews and Whites that were moving into Oakwood did not approve of the Nation for the most part. They avidly spoke against the security patrols, believing that such a "racist" group would greatly divide the community. Los Angeles leaders of the Anti-Defamation League even threatened to build a counter-force for the protection of their people against the Nation's guards. Furthermore, the Hispanic community, which makes up nearly half of the housing under NOI patrolling, voiced some concern about how equally they would be treated. These concerns caved in the support base of the people, weakening the rally to keep the NOI in town. While the basic principles of grassroots, peaceful, and youth-inclusive alternatives to creating harmonious communities worked, politics destroyed the support base upon which any such program depends to survive. As one Lieutenant stated, "They were ineffective. They were isolated. They lacked back-up" (Times Mirror 8/14/93). Once the whole idea of such a patrol became poisoned, it was dropped as illegitimate and unworkable. One can only wonder how effective such an initiative would have been with long-term support.

Nation of Islam Patrols: Possibilities Under Other Organizations

While the Nation of Islam patrols were widely agreed to be a success across the country, they could not survive without widespread support. Many politicians and organizations simply would not concede to financial contracting with what they decried as a "hate group." Louis Farrakhan and some of his top aides have publicly

denounced Jews in speeches, their newspaper "*The Final Call*," and a documentary book called *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews* which negatively records the Jewish role in the slave trade, media, and government. Though some contend that Farrakhan has softened his beliefs and approach in recent years, others still decry him as one of this country's loudest racists.

Yet few Americans can deny that the African American community is a marginalized one, given low priority on political agendas. As thousands of Black families suffer in segregated and impoverished inner cities, crime continues to threaten urban life. Police efforts are stunned by a strained relationship with Blacks, rooted in years of mutual animosity. Such a program as the alternative that the Nation offered addressed the problem of a racist outsider controlling African American communities. In the case of NOI, the interests of Black America, not the financial rewards of the contract, are at the center of their mission. Lifting Blacks to a position of self-sufficiency is the ultimate vision of NOI.

Herein lies a controversial, yet enlightening paradox. Most Americans want to decrease crime in US inner cities. The Nation of Islam produced a viable program that is theoretically agreeable to all. Yet we cannot turn away from the fact that NOI has produced prejudicial dogma. This does not, however, justify tossing the security patrols idea without recognizing the solution that emerged? There are many other organizations in the United States that, given the proper resources and advocacy, could operate similarly to the Nations' patrols. For example, the NAACP and Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition/PUSH are two popularly supported programs that have a lot of clout all over America. Their goals are not racialized as the NOI, but aim primarily at

Black and inner city communities. While neither have the tradition of security that NOI has, they could collaborate with the Nation on training and tactics. Grassroots, peaceful, and youth-led initiatives are automatically suspect by politicians who would rather play conservatively, than risk their image on a revolutionary idea. However, if they would support a program that incorporated broad public support, with police expertise, with non-government organizations' pure vision for the future of Black America, and with a voice from youth and community leaders, a more peaceful future would await those now suffering in America's inner cities.

CONCLUSION: A NEW APPROACH TO HEALING AMERICAN VIOLENCE

Traditionally, we are not a country comfortable with the virtues of grassroots leadership, the power of peace, or the intuitiveness of youth. We do not easily trust programs that are not thoroughly tested throughout history or grounded in rationality. Most Americans discount programs like the youth patrols and the Nation of Islam security brigades because it seems illogical that grassroots initiatives are as workable as those nurtured in the establishment, or that peace could counter the physical power of force, or that youth have visions equal to the acculturated ideas of adults. Yet, it is apparent to almost everyone that traditional modes of lessening urban violence, namely the police and the National Guard, are inept alone.

Both the youth patrol programs and the Nation of Islam security offer a viable project that can work in conjunction with police. Not only have they proven to work in curbing violence, they also function as much needed liaisons. The youth patrols bridged misunderstandings between the communities and authorities, while the

Nation created lines of communication between residents and housing officials. These initiatives did not work despite the fact that they were grassroots, peaceful, and youth-inclusive, but because they were. Communities rallied around these projects because they were actively involved in their creation and implementation. They were not top-down orders, but rather programs that answered directly to the self-declared needs of the community. Likewise, the patrols did not squeak by through a peaceful approach. Rather it was this composed demeanor that guaranteed respect from a community so long entrenched in violence. For the first time, residents of these neighborhoods were being addressed as intelligent citizens, not targeted as senseless criminals. Finally, the youths, a cohort often the main actors in urban violence, were respected as decision-makers. Instead of assuming their needs and motives, these two programs actively included their voice into decision-making and implementation.

Yet, because of the immediate skepticism that such programs draw, it is of paramount importance that the patrols are aided by widespread support. When defectors berate the patrols, without noticing the possibilities they present, the programs' power implodes. Community members, local, state, and federal authorities, and businesses must work together in agreement of the best program scenario for their particular region's needs.

Finally, community patrols are unjust if they are not rooted in principles of change. To simply dissuade violence without caring for the great needs in Black urban communities that cause this violence, is to pile another institution onto the mountain of efforts that try to address African American issues, but only when they affect mainstream America--smoothing over problems for show, without recognizing the layers of

injustice that cause the disturbed surface.

As the 21st century begins, we see that Black urban violence still rules the inner city. GOP and Democratic primaries wage on with little substantial discussion of the devastated housing projects throughout the country. Perhaps Americans have grown discouraged, having lost faith that any measures can answer the overwhelming problem. What I propose is a fresh alternative that, while used in the past, was relatively ignored as a viable means to rejuvenate urban communities. Along with the criteria I have researched and mentioned throughout the paper, each city would have to draft the particulars that would work best in its own community. These proposals would need widespread support through resources and advocacy. Peace studies experts are essential to assist patrollers in this unexplored field of peacekeeping. Police trust must accompany all efforts.

These are new endeavors, which while tested in the past through the Youth Patrols and Nation of Islam security, still need to mature. They demand the time afforded to other new initiatives. If problems arise, the dedication to address them and rework ideas must prevail. It is nerve-racking for any politician or leader to revolutionize the way their district is run. Yet, it is the most revered leaders who have the courage, wisdom, and conviction to do so.

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