

25 Civilians Killed in America For Each GI Killed In Iraq

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Preoccupied with the fighting in Sadr City, it may have escaped President Bush's notice that millions of African-Americans live in blighted neighborhoods, some of which, like Sadr City, also appear to have been ravaged by bloodshed and violence.

"The physical landscape of such neighborhoods often consists of abandoned buildings, poor-quality housing stock, unclean streets, and a low quality of municipal services—particularly schools and recreational facilities," urban affairs experts James Carr and Nandinee Kutty write in their new book, "Segregation: The Rising Costs For America" (Routledge). "High levels of crime, violence, and drug trafficking created extreme social disorder in America's jobless ghettos," write Kutty, an urban housing consultant and Carr, Chief Operating Officer for the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.

Chicago's police superintendent Jody Weis doesn't have to read about violence in books. The Associated Press reported April 21st Weis "blamed an excess of guns and gangs for a rash of 26 shootings over the weekend that killed (eight) and wounded victims from 13 to 65 years old." Similar reports of slaughter have been seeping like swamp gas out of Philadelphia, Richmond, Calif., Cincinnati, Oakland, New Haven, and others. "Violent Crime In Cities Shows Sharp Surge, Reversing Trend," The New York Times reported March 9th. Since September 11, 2001, nearly 100,000 people have been murdered in the U.S., The Times' Bob Herbert wrote last September 29th, surveying a period of just six years. As Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, put it: "There are pockets of crime in this country that are astounding."

Let's see now, four thousand goes into 100,000 25 times, so for every GI killed in Iraq, 25 American civilians are murdered in USA and you can't blame it on "Islamofascists." Maybe President Bush's would pay attention to our home-grown terrorism if newspapers publish photographs of all the local children and adults that have been murdered in their communities just as they print the pictures of GI's killed in the Middle East. Bush won't change his policy, of course, but the graphics might make Americans realize Iraq is a trillion-dollar sideshow we can't afford because we have an urgent crisis at home.

Back in 1962, the National Urban League's Whitney Young called for a "Marshall Plan" to combat urban poverty and President Kennedy didn't respond, either. Generation after generation, America consigns its minorities to largely segregated cities, some even more segregated today (80 and 90 percent) than they were in 1860. Congress is shelling out \$700 billion to fight wars around the world this year but can't find pennies to open the doors of opportunity to our segregated millions.

A single fighter plane today can cost \$15 million. You can hire a lot of good teachers with that kind of money. You can finance a lot of housing. You can create a lot of domestic jobs. Sure, there are whites who insist blacks should lift themselves up by the proverbial bootstraps—without recognizing that in some ghettos the most lucrative business open to the poor is drug-running. As Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA told AP, “The criminal economy is one of the only alternatives in some of these places. You basically have the criminalization of a whole community, particularly in some inner cities.” Result: of 2.3 million Americans behind bars, 500,000 of them were caged for drug crimes. And who is surprised that about 40% of them are African-Americans? Steve Mariotti of the non-profit National Foundation For Teaching Entrepreneurship(NFTE) says drug gang members display much the same ingenuity as entrepreneurs—but lack constructive opportunities for their talents. NFTE has helped 150,000 inner city youth “turn street smarts into business smarts,” so it can be done. Kids who once served as lookouts for drug lords are running legit start-ups of their own, taking a bite out of crime.

It’s fortunate some inner city kids can create their own businesses because racism in employment is alive and well. Just as real estate operators steer minority renters and home-seekers away from functional, white suburbs, employers in those suburbs don’t have openings when minority job-seekers knock. “There is strong evidence that prejudiced attitudes on the part of employers result in discrimination against qualified minority job applicants,” writes Margery Turner, director of the Urban Institute’s Metropolitan Housing and Communities policy center, in “Segregation.” “Blacks are particularly unlikely to be hired for jobs that require higher cognitive skills, especially daily computer use, arithmetic, or customer interaction. Many analysts have suggested that customer prejudice may also be a factor, since the racial composition of a firm’s workforce has been found to be related both to the race of the manager and to the racial composition of the firm’s customers.” Turner adds, “In general, minority job seekers are less successful in using their networks of family and friends than whites. Again, although residential segregation is not the only reason why minorities have less effective networks, it certainly is a factor, particularly for minorities living in high-poverty center city neighborhoods and also for those in the segregated suburbs.”

And as long as public education is funded from property taxes, white school children continue to enjoy a competitive advantage. Deborah McKoy and Jeffrey Vincent, both with the University of California at Berkeley Center for Cities and Schools, point out a single-family home in predominantly Prince George’s county, Md., outside Washington, D.C., was priced at \$195,400 in 2003 compared to \$365,900 for a house in predominantly white Fairfax county, Va. “Residential segregation clearly contributes to minorities’ unequal educational attainment and hence to their disadvantaged position in the evolving labor market,” they write in “Segregation.” “Black high school graduation rates, employment rates, and wages are all negatively affected by the level of black-white segregation in a city. Other things being equal, high levels of segregation have shown to increase high school dropout rates among blacks, reduce employment among blacks, (while increasing the white employment rate), and widen the gap between black and white wages.”

The struggle to create a color-blind republic with a level playing field has been underway in earnest ever since returning black World War Two veterans decided “we aren’t going to take it anymore.” Significant gains have been made over stubborn opposition, gains that Rev. Martin Luther King and others paid for with their blood, yet equal opportunity remains America’s unfinished business. If injustice continues to breed poverty and crime, we may

soon be sending our kids to school in bullet-proof vests, just like the flak jackets Commander-in-Chief Bush's embassy workers wear in Baghdad's Green Zone.

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