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## TRUTH IN LOVE

### Everybody, Pick Up Your Piece of the Puzzle

By Parris J. Baker  
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*Editor's note: Following is the second in a series of articles on violence in Erie, Pennsylvania*

I recently spoke with Daryl Craig, affectionately known as “Brother D,” pastor of the House of Prayer of Erie (H.O.P.E.), community activist, and one of the founders of the Blue Coats. The Blue Coats organization is an anti-violence initiative developed by Craig and Erie County Councilman Andre Horton, with the support and spiritual guidance of the late Robert L. Gaines, pastor of Abundant Life Ministries, Inc.

Our conversation, as it usually does, centered on the increased violence with and among our African American youth in Erie and explored possible methods to mitigate the violence. Without hesitation, almost abruptly, Brother D responded to my unspoken inquiry in this way: “Brother Parris, we’ve got to own this problem. This problem was created on our watch. We know who the shooters are, and we know where they reside. **To fix this problem** ... everybody must pick up their part of the puzzle!”

Like a vivid horror film watched just before bed, the words of Pastor Craig haunted me, and at times, prohibited sleep. Within me grew an obsession with finding clues, soul searching, for weeks, for elusive answers, but generally finding more persistent questions. I began to ask myself every day, “What is my piece of the puzzle?” Not satisfied or settled with my answers, I began to ask family,

friends, strangers, and strangers who became new friends, “What is your piece of the puzzle?”

I would explain to any who would listen, the metaphor of the puzzle is to perceive neighborhood violence in predominantly African American communities as the problem and the challenge. Picking up our part of the puzzle is the process of taking personal responsibility to unscramble and resolve the problem by answering the question, “what can I do to reduce community violence?”

Unfortunately, there were some community members who responded capriciously, “Not my problem. I didn’t do anything to cause the violence and I can’t do anything to fix the problem.”

Violence is not new in African American neighborhoods and communities. Given the historic ecosystem of Black Americans, from precolonial to postmodern America, violence in America and specifically in Black communities is as unpredictable and deadly as the current coronavirus crisis, and if we complete the comparison, development of a “vaccine” or “strategies” for reducing violence in African American communities will require similarly devoted and multidimensional efforts.

Moreover, violent crime, when Black people assault or kill other Black people in their communities, is not a unique phenomenon nor should it be a surprise. It is not uncommon for the perpetrator of violence to have similar characteristics of the victim. This statement is not a capitulation or acquiescence to some predeterminate conclusion. It is true, presented in an unveiled yet necessary revelation of extant actualities. Truth is a necessary ingredient for social, spiritual, and cultural transformation. Dr. Myles Monroe, pastor of Bahama Faith Ministries and best-selling author asserted, “You can never change what you don’t confront or transform what you avoid.”

According to the 2019 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Criminal Victimization Report [1]: (1) “The offender was of the same race or ethnicity as the victim in 70 percent of violent incidents involving black victims, 62 percent of those involving white victims, 45 percent of those involving Hispanic victims, and 24 percent of those involving Asian victims. (2) The number of violent-crime victims 12 or older rose from 2.7 million in 2015 to 3.3 million in 2018, an increase of 604,000 victims.” Examination of the 2019 FBI Uniformed Crime Reporting (UCR) data, finds that when the perpetrator and victim’s race were known, 91 percent of African American homicide victims were murdered by an African American. For homicide victims who were white, 81 percent of the time they were killed by a white perpetrator.[2] But these data do not clearly communicate an accurate portrayal of the problem.

Referred to by media, politicians, and policy makers as “Black-on-Black crime,” these data present a superficial understanding of a much more convoluted

problem. “Black-on-Black” crime is an emblematic, emotionally provocative phrase in which pathology, immorality, and a predeterminism are assigned to Black people. A more accurate way to present the problem of “Black-on-Black” crime, according to Brentin Mock, reporter for Bloomberg News (2015),<sup>[3]</sup> is to call it what is, crime and violence in racially segregated communities. Given that 81 percent of white homicide victims were killed by a white offender, there is nowhere in research literature or mass media outlets where you find the phrase, “white-on-white crime.” This “Black-and-white” racialized crime codification can lead to unintentional or deliberate deception, poor assessment and therefore poor planning of the problem, and intellectual expedience rather than intellectual rigor.

Found in the short version of the Serenity Prayer, how our nation and our communities confront the problem of violence and crime in racially segregated communities, in places like Chicago, Illinois, Rochester, New York, and Erie, Pennsylvania, can begin with the following: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. We all have a role to perform, a way to participate, and a piece of the puzzle to pick up.

1. *Criminal Victimization, 2019 (2020)*, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved [here](#)
2. *2019 Crime in the U.S.* Federal Bureau of Investigation. Retrieved [here](#).
3. *Examining The Origins of the Phrase 'Black-on-Black Crime'*, Bloomberg. Retrieved [here](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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