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# THE PROACTIVE APPROACH TO PREVENTING CRIME

*Emanuel Cleaver II\**

As Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, I not only welcomed, but lobbied strenuously for passage of the Anti-Crime Bill. It is far from a perfect piece of legislation and far from being *the* solution to our nation's crime problem, but it is a good start. I can make that statement based on personal experience and the success of programs I have instituted in my city.

But first, some personal background . . .

## I. THE KANSAS CITY EXPERIENCE

When I was sworn in as Mayor of Kansas City nearly four years ago, I thought economic development was going to be my top priority. If you had told me that, in 1994, crime would be the number one issue in Kansas City and across the nation, I would have called you crazy.

Not any more.

Kansas City, Missouri is a fairly large and diverse community with 430,000 people, stretching over 320 square miles. My city is fairly representative of the United States. So typical are we that, for years, Kansas City has been used as a test market for everything from potato chips to the McDonald's Happy Meal.

We are typical, too, in that crime and fear seem out of control, and too many of our children are dying.

Consider the grim realities (according to Kansas City Police Department statistics):

- in the first six months of 1994, nine Kansas City children were murdered;
- in 1993, Kansas City set a record for homicide with a total of 153 women, men, and children murdered;
- in 1993, forty-two separate youth gangs were operating in the city;
- in 1993, police recorded 269 drive-by shootings;
- in 1993, according to the 1993 FBI Uniform Crime Report, Kansas City ranked fourth in serious crime among the fifty largest cities in the nation, beating out Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles in per capita crime.

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\* Mayor, Kansas City, Missouri.



Population continues to decline: between 1960 and 1990, the urban core of Kansas City lost more than 220,000 residents and nearly 50,000 households. Those people who stayed suffer disproportionately high levels of poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, and crime.

An eroding population means an eroding tax base.

It is a time of desperate needs, dwindling resources, and cynicism and disgust on the part of the electorate.

I have been personally touched by crime as well. A few years ago, a drug-crazed addict broke into my church office, held a gun to my head, and demanded money. He left with four dollars, my watch, and my wedding ring. As a Methodist minister, I have conducted funeral services for two teenage brothers killed together by gun fire and for the gang-involved son of a parishioner, whose cold-eyed fellow gang members placed a beeper in the coffin before it was closed.

I am the father of four children, and my heart breaks knowing that today in Kansas City:

- eight babies will be born to teenage mothers;<sup>1</sup>
- 15% of total homicides in the metropolitan area are teens;<sup>2</sup>
- minority teens make up 85% of the total teen homicides;<sup>3</sup>
- one out of every 106 babies born in Kansas City will die before his or her first birthday;<sup>4</sup>
- one out of every eight children under the age of eighteen receives Aid to Families with Dependent Children.<sup>5</sup>

The grim realities I face as Mayor of Kansas City are typical of those faced by community leaders across the nation. These horrifying statistics represent two decades of systematic neglect of our children and urban centers by the White House, Congress and the judiciary, the business sector, and the general public.

As a nation, we seem to respond only to crisis.

In response to the violence and carnage in Los Angeles (and at my request), Kansas City area business leaders raised more than one million dollars in less than three weeks for summer jobs. We put 3,573 economically-disadvantaged young men and women to work in the summer of 1992.<sup>6</sup> My office employed two young men, Will and Dajuan, who learned the value of a job well done and the self-respect that is inherent with employment. And they earned a fair wage.

Yet, one year later after the embers of Los Angeles had cooled and the television images had faded from our collective memories, few noticed when we had to cut our summer employment program from a targeted 4,000 jobs to

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1. PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN, 1994/95 REPORT CARD & DATA BRIEFING BOOK 1994, at 22.

2. *Id.* at 23.

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.* at 14.

5. *Id.* at 12.

6. Donald Bradley, *3000 Summer Jobs Shaved*, KANSAS CITY STAR, June 12, 1993, at A1.



1,000.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1993, we turned away over 3,000 economically-disadvantaged young Kansas Citians who were willing and able to work. Last year, no one cared.

At the same time in Los Angeles, billboards encouraged teenagers to sign up for the expected 40,000 summer jobs. Eventually, only 12,000 jobs were available in Los Angeles, the site of the disturbances.<sup>8</sup>

What a difference a year makes.

The message sent to the young people in Kansas City and across the nation was clear: "Riot and you'll get jobs; otherwise, we don't care."

The rhetoric in the debate over the Anti-Crime Bill also sent the wrong message.

We needed that bill *not* to lock up the criminals and throw away the key. We needed it to restore hope in our communities and neighborhoods with real crime *prevention* programs. We needed to prevent the probability of crime with 100,000 new police officers, community policing, midnight basketball programs and other social programs. We need to be proactive and not reactive.

I know from personal experience that proactivity works. First, because I am myself a product of the programs of the Great Society. Secondly, because of the several programs I have initiated in Kansas City, including two specifically included in the Anti-Crime Bill.

## II. COMMUNITY POLICING

In the spring of 1993 the Central Patrol Division of the city's Police Department implemented a trial community policing program within three of its neighborhoods. Two police officers were assigned to each neighborhood, taken out of cars and placed on bicycles. They were given special training on how to involve residents, identify neighborhood hotspots, and become collaborative partners with the community.

One of the most successful collaborations occurred in the Olde Hyde Park neighborhood in central Kansas City. There, a strong neighborhood association worked with their bicycle patrol officers and the Jackson County Prosecutor's DART (Drug Abatement Response Team) to identify drug houses and other neighborhood hotspots. For eleven consecutive weeks during the summer of 1993 residents accompanied by community officers staged Friday night "sit-ins" in front of suspected drug houses.

The results: fifteen drug houses were closed down, and crime was reduced by twenty-three percent.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, neighbors felt a sense of empowerment and hope that they could reclaim their once peaceful neighborhood.

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7. *Id.*

8. *Id.* at A7.

9. PROJECT NEIGHBOR-H.O.O.D.—A PROPOSAL TO THE CITY OF KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, January 24, 1994, at 4.



The Reverend John Barbone, an Olde Hyde Park resident, said "Community policing has changed this neighborhood. It's given us hope for the future." He had considered moving out of the area; community policing changed his mind.<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1993, following the success of the trial community policing projects, I convened a broad-based coalition of community agencies in an attempt to implement community policing citywide. As of today, we have opened seven new Community Action Network (CAN) Centers throughout our city. Each center features three key components: two community police officers, one codes inspector, and one community mobilizer.

The two community police officers work within the surrounding neighborhood. Their primary responsibility is to develop a rapport with residents and to acquaint themselves with all facets of the neighborhood.

The City Codes Inspectors work with volunteers and residents to deal with neighborhood blight, closing down or improving buildings and property. Residents are being trained to do basic inspections themselves and to report code violations to the inspectors for further action.

The neighborhood mobilizer works one-on-one with residents, dealing with personal problems like substance abuse and domestic violence. The mobilizers are extensively trained in substance abuse services and are experts at networking to serve their neighbors' needs.

The CAN Centers are not mini-city halls, nor are they police substations. Instead, they are a new, neighborhood-based, drug and crime-fighting unit.

Under the Anti-Crime Bill, Kansas City is eligible for an additional 250 police officers. Because of budgetary constraints and the twenty-five percent local match requirement, we have decided to apply for 150 new officers. Fifty of those new officers will be assigned to community policing duties.

### III. MAYOR'S NIGHT HOOPS

Midnight basketball was the subject of much ridicule during the Anti-Crime Bill debate. That ridicule was undeserved.

I started the Mayor's Night Hoops program in the summer of 1992 with a sixteen-team basketball league at Central High School. In 1993, the league jumped to forty-eight teams. This past summer, a new sport (volleyball) and two new sites were added to the program, with a total of seventy teams participating.

The games are played on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights throughout the summer, from ten at night until two in the morning—the time when most criminal activity occurs. Security guards are on hand, and all players pass through metal detectors. In the three years of Mayor's Night Hoops, there has never been a single violent incident, despite the fact that many of the participants belong to rival gangs.

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10. Steve Penn, *11 Possible Sites for Alert Centers are Checked Out*, KANSAS CITY STAR, January 15, 1994, at C2.



The police department has begun tracking crime reports during the times and in the surrounding areas of the Night Hoops games. Preliminary indications are that crime is down in the Night Hoops areas during the times of the program activity. As Police Chief Steven Bishop reported to me in August 1994, "only at times other than the specified activities (and more than one hour earlier or one hour later) did arrests occur, or were crimes reported in the areas surrounding the three recreation centers."

The success of the program can also be measured by the year-to-year increase in the number of youth participants. There is also a great deal of anecdotal evidence. When I attend the Night Hoops games, young people inevitably tell me how grateful they are for the program and that, without Night Hoops, "we'd be out on the streets and maybe getting into some trouble."

There is also an educational component to the program. In order to play, the young people are required to attend a minimum of ten hours of classes over the ten-week period. The classes are held prior to the games and cover a variety of subjects, including substance abuse, anger control, conflict resolution, entrepreneurship, and others.

The dozens of adult volunteers who staff the program also serve as role models for the young people. The Night Hoops games have also become a popular source of entertainment: it's not unusual to have from 200 to 400 people watching and cheering in the stands.

My vision for Kansas City in the summer is a Night Hoops program that attracts all kinds of kids. I don't care whether they're involved in gang activity. I don't care if they have a grade point average of 0.1. I don't care whether they can conjugate the verb "to be" or quote from Shakespeare. All I want them to do is to commit themselves to Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night. If they come (and they do), we deal with their bodies and we deal with their minds.

Every recreation program that we can put in place is a crime prevention tool. In 1994, the Mayor's Night Hoops program cost less than \$100,000 and served 700 young people. In contrast, the U.S. Justice Department estimates that it costs \$29,600 to keep one teenager in detention for a year. In 1993, the U.S. spent \$2.3 billion in juvenile incarceration.<sup>11</sup>

Compared to that cost, midnight basketball is a bargain.

#### IV. FINAL THOUGHTS

There is no single or simple solution to the problem of crime. We must take a holistic approach, reclaiming our cities neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block, even house by house.

In addition to the CAN Centers and the Mayor's Night Hoops, I have instituted such grass-roots programs as Police in Neighborhoods (a low-cost financing program that encourages police officers to buy or build homes in

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11. Jeff Fletcher, *Parks & Recreation Programs Help Prevent Crime*, NATION'S CITIES WEEKLY, June 13, 1994, at 9.



targeted neighborhoods), Evening Youth Clubs, Summer Job Insurance for young people (requiring businesses with large city contracts to set aside either a job or money to hire young workers), a city-wide gun buy-back, and other programs.

As Mayor, I can help get a neighborhood lighted. I can get a policeman living in the neighborhood. I can lobby in Washington to get more police to deal with crime suppression and I can come up with programs to deal with crime prevention. I can provide leadership both as a member of the Board of Police Commissioners and as President of the City Council.

The solution is with all of us.

We must recognize that this nation, in order to preserve the destiny of our democracy, to insure our future social and economic well-being, must fundamentally reorder its national priorities.

We must expand our boundaries of possible solutions. We must take off our narrow ideological blinders. We must move away from quick fixes and soundbites and look deeper to the root causes of our problems.

Those problems are unprecedented and require creative leadership, collaboration, and a sense of community.

It's up to all of us.