

Fear of a Black - Brown Race War in Los Angeles

Written by Charlene Muhammad ID4290
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While law enforcement, politicians and community activists spar over whether recent gang-related shootings should be officially classified as race-related and investigated as hate crimes, community and peace activists say tensions between Blacks and Latinos continue to escalate, building anger, distrust and above all, feeding right into the hands of a common enemy of both communities.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) reported in early March that the majority of this year's homicides have been Black on Black and Brown on Brown. Blacks, according to the LAPD, made up 13 percent of the suspects in homicides against Latinos and Latinos were 35 percent of the suspects in homicides against Blacks.

During a March 11 press conference announcing the hiring of 500 police officers and expanded recruitment efforts for 500 more, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa indicated gang murders dropped nearly 30 percent last year and the total number of homicides fell to a 38-year low, reaching a level unseen in the city since 1969. Some community activists say LAPD's most recent crime statistics simply do not add up.

"There's an inherent contradiction in what Villaraigosa's saying and to an extent what Chief Bratton is saying. Their own numbers don't show me that there's overwhelming evidence that these are just strictly intra-racial killings. About one-third, a significant percentage, of these killings of Blacks are by Latinos and these figures in fact indict them from making statements that there is no racial motivation to it. We need to know why," said Dr. Earl "Ofari" Hutchinson, an author and radio show host.

He and other community activists are calling on L.A. District Attorney Steve Cooley to add a hate crime to charges faced by two Latino suspects charged with shooting six-year-old Lavareay Elzy in Harbor Gateway in March.

Call to arms among Blacks?

Dr. Hutchinson told The Final Call that the push for hate crime charges and investigations are rooted in a proven history of Latino gangs, such as Harbor Gateway's 204th Street gang,

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targeting Blacks, like 14-year-old Cheryl Green, fatally shot while she was playing with friends, and the broad daylight shooting of Lavareay Elzy. The shooters could see they were targeting a child and 17-year-old Jamiel Shaw, a football star with no gang affiliation, was also killed.

Scoobey da Pharaoh, of the Rolling 40s Westside Crips, which has forged peace through stand-downs with four other street gangs, is a gang interventionist of Panamanian and Colombian ancestry. He believes it is a serious error to call for hate crime charges in recent shootings. He is also concerned about rumors that Black youth are being encouraged to carry guns to protect themselves.

“I look Black, but I’m Latino, too and we have to realize that this is divide and conquer being repeated. As Black folks we need to have a major media campaign to expose the real problem, which is not really an all out race problem, but it’s a problems between Southern California Mexican gangs and Southern California Black gangs. You can’t have a lynching, throw a rope over a tree and pull that rope when the loop is still around your neck, and that’s what our people are doing,” he said.

Khallid Shaw, executive director of the Stop the Violence Increase the Peace Foundation, found, in his previous role as chair of the L.A. County Interagency Gang Task Force, that key individuals within gangs pushed racial overtones, but overall members of Black and Latino communities worked together on their struggles.

“I think there’s another, bigger hand involved in this whole move. Obviously there are racial overtones and I think that the call to arms that we’re hearing about is the way people are feeling right now as a result of a lot of the information that’s going on. I would just caution my folks and especially my good brothers to be careful because there’s been a call to arms before, but it wasn’t the soldiers calling for it, it was folks who wanted to destroy the movement,” he cautioned.

‘Race plays a part’ in shootings

Members of the community are hopeful that Deputy Chief Kenny Garner, the LAPD’s new Commanding Officer of Operations at the South Bureau, and who is Black, will offer an open door for residents to express fears and concerns about gang-related shootings and

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Black-on-Black homicides. Chief Garner was appointed to the South Bureau, which covers South L.A. and Harbor City, in January, months before the rash of shootings occurred. His assignment was effective in March.

“There is a lack through the school system, the church, through family and other institutions, and unfortunately, race does play a part, whether we really want to accept that or not,” Chief Garner told The Final Call. But that applies to all racial groups, not just with Blacks and Latinos, he said. For example, he said, a recent incident with Black suspects was prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, and even characterized as gang-related when it was not. And an identical matter perpetrated against a Black victim was dismissed as an “incident,” he said. To stop the violence, adults must include children and youth in solution-based discussions, Chief Garner said.

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