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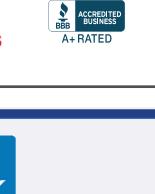
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The Long Journey Home

Opinion Editorial

There are so many wonderful organizations, civic and nonprofits, in Chattanooga with good intentions, but they are all working in silos. The time is now to come together under a common cause to implement solutions to the problems that plague our culture and communities. My return home has been a long journey. I am sharing my story as an example of a common cause and an option for implementing a solution to the problem.

Imagine losing your mother when you are 19 years old. My mother died of a heart attack which was no doubt the result of unchecked hypertension.

Back then African Americans did not go to doctors unless they were pregnant, and they certainly did not do routine health check-ups. My dad was always there for us. However, imagine your father, now a single parent of six, has a heart attack eight years later after losing his wife. He underwent a triple by-pass surgery which extend his life for another ten years. Now imagine, during the recuperation period, your father is informed that his oldest son, my beloved brother, Donald Ramsey, age 25, was found dead in his apartment. He was the victim of a violent homicide crime and struck down in the prime of life before reaching his highest potential. Donald was a business student at UTC and worked as the manager for a rental car agency at the Chattanooga Airport. He was murdered by an African /American female, 18-year-old Jetta Smith who was a senior in high school. Her accomplice was Kerry Price 20. Some 30+ years later my family and I still grieve the loss of a loving brother.

Fast forward to today, 2022, and violent crimes have gotten worst. According to the Chattanooga Police department the homicide rate, which includes gun violence, is up. In 2021, 61 percent of the shooting violence was committed by Black males and the rate for Black women is increasing as these perpetrators are getting younger. Couple this with police brutality of Blacks and an increase in WRT-White Replacement Theory which is the fear that White Supremacy groups hold against Blacks whom they think are replacing them in this nation. There is no doubt that history is repeating itself. Is evil winning? Man's need to

control man is an evil that is rearing its head in our communities, across this nation and around the world. And it is as old as the ancient Biblical stories of the Christian Holy Bible.

When I think of the major gains Dr. Martin Luther King Jr made in the 60's and how he sacrificed his life to obtain freedom for his people, I cry. Peeling back the layers to determine how we got here is like peeling an onion. I cry. Have the gains that Dr. King and all those civil rights leaders who came before and after him been lost? I cry. I would hate to think that his death was in vain.

The work of those who persevered for justice, compassion and understanding must go on. In the words of MLK, "we are the torch bearers of justice". It doesn't end with just the shootings, the work continues as we collectively find solutions, change the narratives, and begin the healing process. Those civil rights leaders then and now persevered so that African Americans could be included and have a seat at the table. Black leaders and those pioneers sought understanding, empathy, and compassion from those who hated us.

Today advocates for a common cause continue to seek a seat at the table. They do so peacefully. And now we must forgive. As Jesus asked his father to forgive, "for they know not what they do". However, forgiveness is not just for them, but for us as well. "Love covers a multitude of sins." – 1 Peter 4:8

Returning home on this road to this beautiful, scenic city has been a very long journey. Thirty years ago, when my brother's life was taken from him by two African Americans, the anger, fear, and hatred settled in. Fortunately for me, I had the support of my faith and my spiritual family that brought me through those dark times. The question today is where is the support for the grieving families, the relatives of these victims of violent crimes? What is the work of the Chattanooga Police Department's (CPD) and Hamilton County Sheriff's department's victim survival units? How does this division align with the D.A.'s office? My family was blessed as we understood our rights. The two who murdered my brother were



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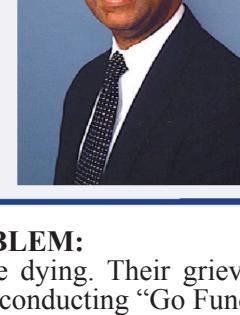
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THE PROBLEM:

Children are dying. Their grieving families are conducting "Go Fund me" campaigns to bury them. Over half of the African American population in Chattanooga lives below the poverty line. Homelessness, poverty, joblessness, violent crimes, trauma, and high school dropout rates are at crisis levels for African American students. The achievement gap has widened, and hopelessness is on the rise.

THE SOLUTION:

We must be proactive and not reactive. It is time to invest in our children. Education is the great equalizer and teachers, and parents need the tools necessary to collaborate more effectively for the sake of the child. Legislators, Faith based leaders, and community leaders must put the politics aside and do the right thing for all children. Provide the children with tools that assist in their holistic development. When given a purpose, children will thrive to reach their highest potential. Offer them relevant mentoring programs that guide them towards a purpose. But more importantly, prepare them for a future based on 21st century needs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Audrey Ramsey is a retired Executive Marketer, former broadcast journalist, adjunct professor, freelance writer, and public speaker. She is currently the Executive Director of the Chattanooga Aquatic Project and Personal Development nonprofit and CEO of the Ramsey Professional Development Consultants, LLC. She is a 1983 recipient of the Mary Walker Image Award.