

Rethinking Violent Crime
By David Raybin

Violent crime is a function of three competing statistics: the number of law enforcement officers on the street, the number of prison beds, and the number of persons who are at risk of committing violent offenses.

Our current national policing policy is to make fewer officers do more with less. I want to be protected by police officers who do not have to take extra jobs to make ends meet.

We must substantially increase the number of police officers. Criminals are deterred more by the fear of increased probability of being caught than by the fear of long sentences.

Over two million people are incarcerated in our nation. Of all the people on earth who are in prison, a quarter are behind bars here in America. Instead of trying to continue to build our way out of the crime crisis, we should make better choices about whom we incarcerate and for how long.

We have far too many crimes on the books. We tend to over-criminalize – and over-punish – too much. In my view, the drug laws should be reviewed to make more rational use of limited prison space. A shorter sentence may send the necessary message and is certainly less costly to society and less destructive to an offender's family.

Probation and parole are not failures. We fail to capitalize on the fact that these programs have a built-in captive audience. Parole officers should be paid in relation to the number of offenders who do not commit new crimes. Extra dollars for alteration-of-behavior programs is a more effective tool for reducing recidivism than steel and concrete.

The space we save with smarter use of limited prison resources should be devoted to the real, hardcore violent criminal even if he is only sixteen. Incarceration for these individuals is “real time” and is for no other purpose than to incapacitate. That is the only “truth in sentencing” which makes sense.

Nashville is not alone in being horrified by an increase in violent crimes; it is happening everywhere. Why? Crime rates go up as the numbers of males between fourteen and twenty-five increases.

The recent, dramatic increase in violent crime correlates exactly with the population surge of those in the most crime-prone age. No other factor – including prisons or police – is as profound in analyzing crime rates. This

complex demographic issue must be given greater attention if we are to significantly reduce violent crime.

The increasing numbers of at-risk individuals suggest some dramatic solutions which must involve our education system. School is now mandatory at six-years of age. Why not make it mandatory at six months and require very early childhood intervention programs for new mothers who may not have learned good parenting skills.

Education classes for older children must stress personal responsibility and that adverse consequences inevitably flow from adverse behavior. Alternative schools for those who break the zero-tolerance school rules are our last chance to intercept the students who are prison-bound yet we devote almost no resources to these programs.

We live in a nation with the greatest freedom on earth where everyone has an almost limitless list of choices. We incorrectly assume that the choices are rational when they are often driven by desperation and a lack of options. That is when crime turns violent and we wonder why.

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