



City violence is back on the front burner

Howard Manly

Rev. Bruce Wall has stirred the pot.

Not that long ago, Wall was alone, a squeaky voice screaming about the growing murder rate in Boston and calling it a "state of emergency."

He is not alone anymore.

"I cannot keep up with the requests from the media outlets who want to speak to me," Wall said in one of his recent mass e-mailings. "I do not know why my words are resonating with so many people."

The reasons are pretty clear.

Last week, Curtis Sliwa of the famed Guardian Angels came to Boston at Wall's invitation, and while the shootings and murders have not stopped, the visibility of the inner-city crime problem is now on the front burner.

More attention means more police, more community involvement and more resources.

And more politics.

In another e-mailing, Wall described Mayor Thomas M. Menino as trying to isolate him from other clergy and city officials. Despite repeated invitations, neither Menino nor Boston Police Commissioner Edward Davis have met with Wall.

"No matter what the city officials say about me," Wall said in an e-mail, "I will keep the door open and continue to hope that the Mayor of Boston and the Police Commissioner will soften their tone, stop asking local pastors to withdraw from me, and choose to work with me, and all of the pastors, activists and residents in the City of Boston."

So far, unity remains an elusive goal.

On Tuesday, the Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA) met with the Boston TenPoint Coalition and Davis and later announced that about 50 members of the BMA would participate in several efforts in Boston's worst neighborhoods. Notably absent was Wall.

Starting on April 14, the BMA said, Boston police officers and members of clergy are scheduled to walk through crime-ridden neighborhoods. Trainings for these walks are scheduled on April 12, from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. at the Charles Street AME Church in Roxbury.

The BMA has also pledged to work with Rev. Jeffrey Brown of Boston's TenPoint Coalition to intervene in beefs between rival gangs. On top of that, Tuesday's meeting also produced what is being called "Operation Home Front," a program that involves working with Boston public schools, MBTA police and BMA clergy to visit the homes of youths considered to be at-risk.

Late Tuesday evening, yet another meeting occurred between Menino and Gov. Deval Patrick. Though the meeting was private, reports indicate that the topic of the meeting was the recent spate in violence and, more importantly, how the state and city can work more effectively to solve the problem.

As it is now, state police are already patrolling streets in Roxbury and Dorchester. And while some crime prevention programs have been eliminated from Patrick's proposed budget in order to cut an estimated \$1.3 billion deficit, a Patrick spokesman

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Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa (right) addresses community leaders and citizens at Global Ministries Church in Dorchester during a meeting held last Thursday to discuss the presence of the Guardian Angels in Boston. A spike in homicides

and a request from Rev. Bruce Wall spurred Sliwa to propose resurrecting his civilian anti-crime patrols in Boston after a 15-year absence, despite opposition from Boston police and Mayor Thomas M. Menino. (AP photo/Steven Senne)

A tale of two sentences

Injustice rears its ugly head in a small Texas town with a sinister past

Howard Witt

PARIS, Texas — The public fairgrounds in this small east Texas town look ordinary enough, like so many other well-worn county fair sites across the nation. Unless you know the history of the place.

There are no plaques or markers to denote it, but several of the most notorious public lynchings of

black Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were staged at the Paris Fairgrounds. Thousands of white spectators would gather to watch and cheer as black men were dragged onto a scaffold, scalded with hot irons and finally burned to death or hanged.

Brenda Cherry, a local civil rights activist, can see the fairgrounds from the front yard of her modest home,

in the heart of the "black" side of this starkly segregated town of 26,000. And lately, Cherry says, she's begun to wonder whether the racist legacy of those lynchings is rebounding in a place that calls itself "the best small town in Texas."

"Some of the things that happen here would not happen if we were in Dallas or Houston," Cherry said. "They

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President Bush (left) shakes hands with Tuskegee Airman Lee Archer Jr. (second from right) as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of Calif. (second from left) shakes hands with Tuskegee Airman Roscoe Brown Jr. (right) during a Congressional Gold

Medal Ceremony honoring the Tuskegee Airmen held last Thursday in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington. Please see our story about the ceremony on pg. 9. (AP photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Ex-Cambridge chief reflects on his career

Serghino René

A little more than a decade ago, Chicago native Ronnie Watson had a simple mission: to improve the Cambridge police department.

In his view, he accomplished that mission.

"I think I have left the police department in better shape than I found it," Watson said.

The statistics bear out Watson's argument. From 1985 to 1995, before Watson's arrival, Cambridge had 36 homicides. In the decade from 1996 through the first nine months of 2006 — the most recent crime data made available by the Cambridge Police Department — the city had experienced 23 homicides, a drop of more than a third.

In the category of part I crime — a broad measure which includes murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft — the difference is even more

stark. In 1995, the year before Watson came aboard, the city saw 4,824 part I offenses. Through the first nine months of 2006, Cambridge reported 2,789 such crimes, a significantly reduced pace.

But numbers only tell part of the tale.

The 62-year-old Watson was Cambridge's second African American police commissioner. He followed Perry Anderson, who left the post in 1995. He also holds the distinction of being the longest-serving commissioner in the city's history. But after 10 years on the job, Watson felt ready to move on.

"It's time for someone new to come to the department and use their energy to take it to the next level," said Watson.

Watson officially retired last month. Robert C. Haas, Mitt Romney's former secretary of public safety, will become the city's new

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