

Statistics make Detroiters cringe at thought of going back

Have you seen the music video for Mary J. Blige's "No More Drama?" At the end of it, she's standing in front of a bunch of television screens depicting the images of the war on terrorism, and she's just going crazy.

That is how I feel right about now.

As if war with Iraq wasn't enough to deal with, there's another war going on right here, in Michigan.

In Detroit, at least 23 youths aged 16 and younger have been killed this year; most of them by gunfire.

A study by the Detroit Free Press showed Detroit surpassed 10 other major U.S. cities in deaths among children.

These recent events are just uncalled for. As someone who grew up in Detroit, it's sad to see a place I once called home is once again being deemed the murder capital of America.

Let's take a look at some of these cases.

| An 11-year-old was killed sitting on his front porch in August. He was the third of his mother's four children to die. Although police have not confirmed whether drugs played a role in the shooting, Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan said the boy's home is only two blocks away from an abandoned house where drugs are openly dealt. He said drug dealers control that neighborhood.

| An 11-year-old was killed by a gunshot wound to the head. He and his 12-year-old half brother were playing with a gun they found on a playground, and the shooting was an accident. The half brother was charged in juvenile court with manslaughter and possession of a firearm.

| A 15-year-old was killed in a gang rivalry. The shooting suspect is a member of the Linwood Boys, while the 15-year-old was a member of the Dexter Boys.

MSU Professor Carl S. Taylor told the Free Press the Dexter-Linwood rivalry dates back at least 25 years. And police don't know of a single event that began the feud.

Keep in mind that these three cases are only a few of the gruesome events that took place this year.

The last one really hurt me the most, though.

I used to live in the Russell Woods neighborhood, which is a historic district in the Dexter-Linwood area. I knew about these gangs, but I didn't expect it to evolve into this.

Even though I don't live in Detroit anymore, it's still hard to forget it. It's probably not for the reasons you think, though.

When most people think of Detroit, the first image that comes to mind is the Renaissance Center. Or the Ambassador Bridge. Maybe Motown, the new casinos or a struggling football team.

But when I think of Detroit, I think of Brush Park, home to once-distinguished Victorian estates that now stand boarded up, side-by-side with dilapidated houses still occupied. I think of the empty lots with overgrown weeds, prostitutes roaming Cass Corridor, and the big and the old empty train station that was my great-grandmother's first stop in her arrival from the South.

These might seem like negative images, but they are true. This is what I grew up around, and this is what I remember.

Leaving Detroit was hard. And I actually left a lot of good memories behind.

But child murders offer sad memories, and call back the negative images that everyone else has of Detroit. They are so horrible that they tempt me to say I never want to go back.

But at least have the comfort of knowing that I'll never again be in the midst of a fight at a V.F.W. party.

I would like to go back, though. But some things have to change.

I hope that by the time I graduate and look for a job, there will be a plan in place to eliminate child violence. It takes more than just candlelight vigils and community protests.

If Detroit can finally knock down abandoned houses, drug dealing will be reduced significantly. I'm not saying it will be erased completely, but it would go down.

The city also needs to do a better job of keeping itself clean. Then maybe kids wouldn't find guns lying around in playgrounds.

Parents and educators need to do a better job of telling their children about the dangers of cliques. They need to make these kids realize what the consequences are when you get involved with the wrong crowd.

This affects all of us, from Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick all the way down to those of us here in East Lansing.

There are a significant number of Spartans from the Motor City area; and even if we don't go back, our families and friends are still there.

When we graduate, we're probably going to get job offers down there, but who'd want to live there if it's still in the shape it's in right now?

When Detroit gets a bad rep, then the rest of the state goes down with it. It might not have an effect immediately, but there will be less money coming in to the state from both outside business and the government.

Please, Detroit, don't let me down. Don't let the rest of us down. Believe it or not, I still have faith in the Big Motor.

I just hope no one else loses theirs.

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