

World Wide Web opens new outlets for Black activism

By Shannon Gibney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

MINNEAPOLIS (NNPA)—Forty years ago, African-Americans were staging sit-ins, getting on buses to D.C., and marching in order to protest racism, classism and other social ills. In 2003, however, African-Americans—along with many other ethnic groups—are increasingly choosing to organize, inform and protest through a less visible medium: the Internet.

"The African-American

community has to realize that we are an information-based society and a knowledge economy, and [we] cannot afford to allow ourselves to be excluded from participating in the Internet—and that includes email, web pages, newsgroups," said Shawn Lewis, a manager for the Greater Twin Cities United Way. "There's this concern with the digital divide, but my disposition is we can't be outside the game looking in. We have to be inside the game, playing. Either you are

at the table, or you're on the table."

As a service to the community, Lewis sends out dozens of e-mail messages about African-American community events and issues to a distribution list every week. Lewis has been sending out the list for about five years, and it continues to grow as the word gets out.

"I think e-mail works in our community because African-Americans are pretty dispersed throughout the metro area. E-mail is nice

way to connect everyone," said Lewis, who tries to send information rather than opinions. He added, "I try to be very supportive of other people sending out information. For whatever reason for our community, people are not getting this information that I'm sending out. Some people may not be able to get KMOJ or the Spokesman, so e-mail offers another option for getting the information. And it's very cost-efficient to get the information out."

Debra Watts, founder,

publisher and president of Watts Five, which distributes the weekly e-zine "The Hook Up Network," also views the Internet as a very effective tool for the Black community.

"Empowering people with information is a powerful form of harnessing power for oneself," said Watts. Though most of the information contained in The Hook Up Network concerns entertainment and arts rather than politics, Watts contends that it still inspires people to take ac-

tion.

"Empowering people is activism, and giving them food for thought is activism—it's doing it in another way. My intent is to give them information about what's happening in the community so that they can choose to engage if they want. I reach people, in most cases, who are outside that circle—urban professionals who...need information that gives them that opportunity. Hopefully, that's the gap that we may be

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U.S. crime figures lowest since 1973

WASHINGTON (AP) - Violent and property crimes dipped in 2002 to their lowest levels since records started being compiled 30 years ago, and have dropped more than 50 percent in the last decade, the Justice Department reported Sunday.

The annual survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics identified about 23 million crime victims last year, down slightly from the year before and far below the 44 million recorded when studies began in 1973.

The rate of violent crimes - rapes, robberies and assaults - was about 23 victims for every 1,000 U.S. residents 12 or older last year. That compares with 25 victims per 1,000 in 2001 and 50 in 1993.

For property crimes such as burglary and car theft, the rate was 159 crimes per 1,000 last year, down from 167 the previous year and 319 in 1993.

The study examined property and violent crimes except murder, which is measured separately by the FBI. Preliminary FBI statistics for 2002 released in June - based on reports from police across the country - reported a 0.8 percentage point rise in the murder rate compared with 2001.

The Justice Department survey, however, found continuing decreases in every major property and violent crime, crossing all household income, racial and ethnic lines. Crime is down in cities, suburbs and rural areas.

Attorney General John Ashcroft credited citizens for being more willing to report crimes and said the numbers are a tribute to the work of police, prosecutors and judges across the country.

"But lower crime rates must not lead to complacency," Ashcroft said. "We must continue our vigilance and renew our firm commitment to protect all Americans, bringing swift and certain justice to all those who would inflict pain and harm."

Experts say a number of factors have driven the crime rate down, including a more mature, less violent illegal drug trade, a drop in gang membership and even improved home locks and alarms that deter would-be burglars.

Even so, the continuing drop in crime surprises some.

"Everyone thought the numbers would bottom out and then go back up, but it hasn't happened," said James Lynch, law professor at the American University Center for Justice, Law and Society.

Some criminologists think tougher prison sentences and more prisons are key factors, because they take more criminals off the streets longer. The Justice Department reported last week that at the end of 2001, more than 5.6 million adults - one in every 37 U.S. adults - were either in state or federal prison or had done prison time during their lives.

Others say that theory is refuted by the government's own data. The Justice Policy Institute, a research group that favors alternatives to prison, pointed out that regions with higher prison expansion rates, such as the South and West, experienced more murders in 2002.

"We need to separate political rhetoric from sound crime and corrections policy," said Vincent Schiraldi, executive director of the institute.

The Justice Department figures on nonfatal crimes for 2002 are based on interviews of a nationally representative sample of 76,050 U.S. residents 12 or above. The previously

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Lake Mead Water Level 2003

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