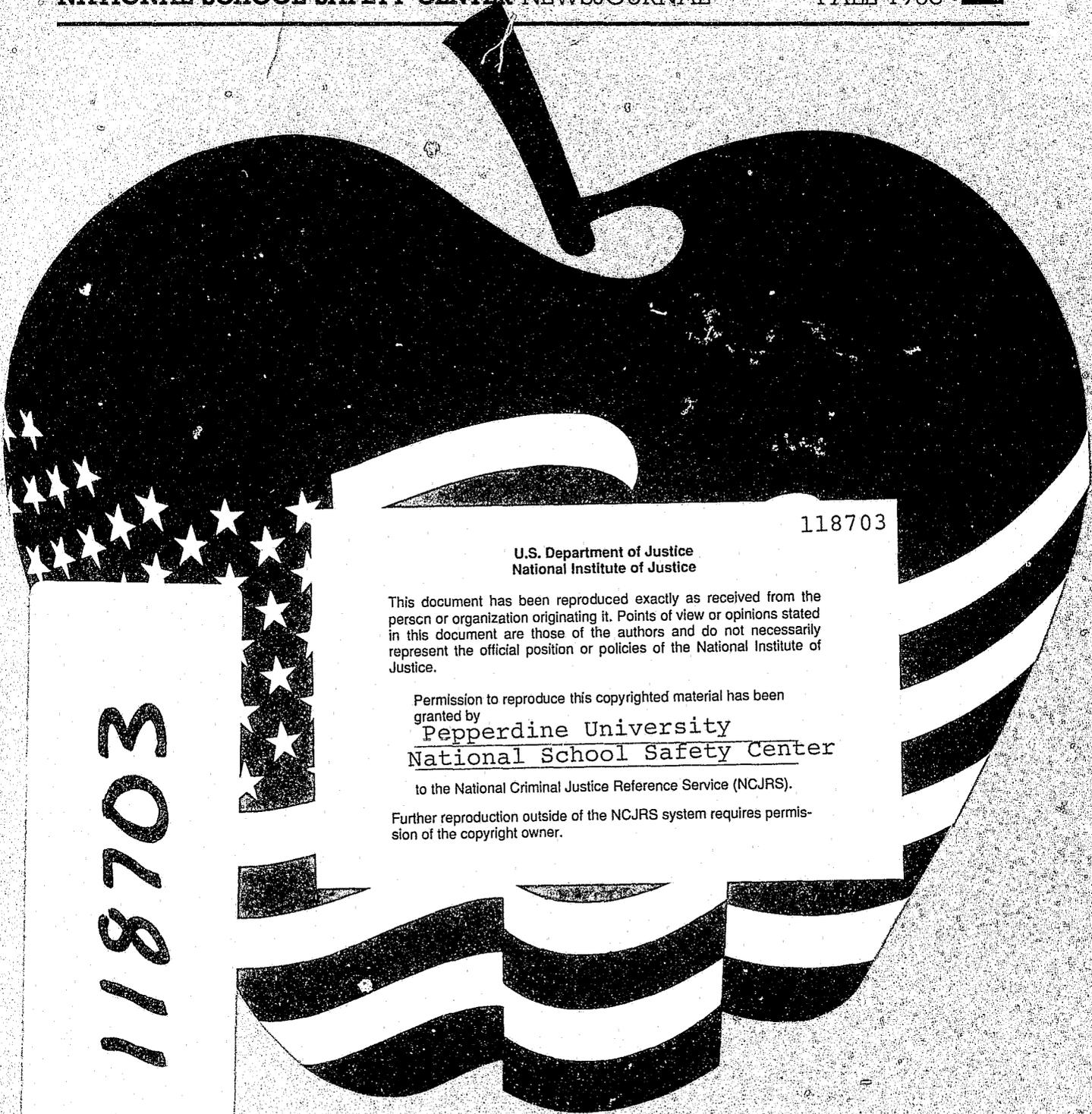


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School Safety

NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER NEWSJOURNAL

FALL 1985



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America's Year of School Safety
1985-1986



National School Safety Center
 7311 Greenhaven Drive
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 916/427-4600

The National School Safety Center is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education and Pepperdine University. NSSC's mission is to coalesce public, private and academic resources throughout America and provide a central headquarters to assist school boards, educators, law enforcers, lawyers and the public to insure all our schools are safe, secure and tranquil places of learning.

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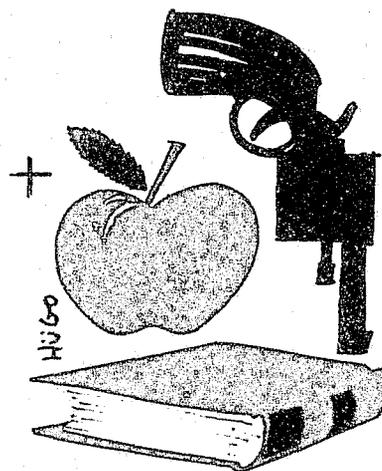
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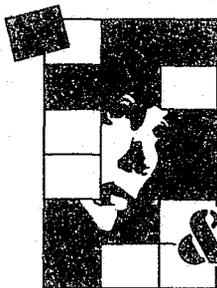
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Teaching love for life: A test for the inner city

By George J. McKenna III

We must offer our children alternatives to fear, hate and violence. Schools have the opportunity to make a difference. We must teach our students the value of human life, non-violence and human dignity.

George J. McKenna III is the principal of George Washington Preparatory High School, a Los Angeles Unified School District public school located in South Central Los Angeles.

I witnessed the funeral of one of my children this week. Although I am not the biological parent, being the child's teacher or school principal gives one a direct sense of loss and anguish that surely approximates the feelings of the natural parents. The young man, a 10th grader at Washington Prep High, whose life was taken by a senseless and totally inhumane act of cruelty, was an innocent victim of the gang violence that has plagued our South Central Los Angeles community for the last several years. The young man, who was not gang-involved, attended school regularly, was a member of the ROTC, and had many friends.

The week before, we buried a neighbor, an innocent woman who was killed by a bullet when she stepped outside her own house to investigate loud noises. The neighbor was a personal friend whom I had known since becoming principal. She had lived in the neat little house across the street for 20 years. The wall on the side of her house was the first wall we painted over five years ago, to remove graffiti. One of our student community service projects was to remove the writing from the walls of all the homes surrounding the school. The wall is still clean five years later - but the neighbor was killed. What did we accomplish?

The chilling murders and other acts of brutality have long been a horribly acceptable part of the daily lives of the residents of the Black community, and the recent media attention to the spe-

cific atrocities of the past month leave a cruelly ironic taste in the mouths of the people who have lived in fear on a daily basis for years.

Over the past 21 years, as a teacher and administrator in several South Central Los Angeles area public schools, I have buried *too many* children due to acts of violence. This one was no different in terms of its devastating effect on the hearts and minds of those who loved the child.

These are *my* people, whose lives I have shared and whose most precious possessions, their children, have been entrusted to me as a public school teacher and now principal. I felt so helpless, being unable to prevent such a terrible event from occurring. It is equally painful for all teachers who work so hard to save the educational and spiritual lives of our children, only to witness their premature physical destruction by the violence within our homes and communities.

The question remains: who is responsible? The answer is simple - we are *all* responsible. Although the *blame* is that of the murderous individuals who pulled the trigger that took the lives of the innocent, the *responsibility* for changing the all too familiar occurrence is *ours*, the educators, the parents, the public, the politicians, the church and the media.

The recent attention and media response to these murders is, as always, misplaced and tardy. My fellow principals within the local school commu-

ity have been besieged by reporters who ask "what are the schools doing about the violence?", as though the fact that children are being killed by children is caused by the schools merely because children are in attendance.

Mass murders and serial killings are always newsworthy and sensational, but the truth is that too little attention is paid to the routine brutality that is *allowed* to exist within the Black and Hispanic communities of Los Angeles every day and night. Gang violence is preventable, but only if we are all prepared to be *responsible*, regardless of who is to blame. Racism dictates that such violence predominates in poor, minority communities. This is no accident, and unless we recognize the causes, the solutions will never be forthcoming.

The solution lies in a cooperative, coordinated and well-funded effort on the part of those segments of the community mentioned before. Since schools are the only institutions that children are *required* to attend, and since the young male is the primary victim of the violence—both as assailant and as victim—we must target the young men in our schools for a massive dose of positive support, nurturing, love

and compassionate *non-violent deprogramming*. Gang violence will leave our community only if we destroy the recruitment effort that pulls at our young men beginning in elementary school. They become convinced they should fight over "territory" they will never own, hate and attack each other, and feel more heroic by dying in the streets with \$2,000 in their pockets from selling cocaine, rather than working for a minimum wage, selling chicken and learning how to one day own the chicken shack.

Our children are at a risk, and therefore, so is our future. Unless we institutionalize an *educational* approach to the problem, we will continue to rely on punitive measures and penalties to make us feel as though we are addressing the problem. Police and more jails cannot solve the problem of why young men join gangs and thus cannot permanently remove gang violence from the community.

The well-intentioned programs currently being funded, albeit not adequately, have only been able to reduce gang violence statistics over the past three years. Down is not out, and a lesser degree of violence is totally unacceptable as a tolerable phenomenon within any community.

Unless we make the

commitment to *eliminate* gang violence, we will always accept a level of violence as tolerable.

The non-violent teachings of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have never been so necessary as now. A non-violent curriculum can be introduced into our schools, and a five to eight year commitment to a well-funded, effective program will enable us to virtually eliminate gang recruitment of our young men until they are beyond the reach of the predators. Each targeted school would have full time staff, gang diversion counselors and a comprehensive and unified program which teaches young men to be strong, sharing and concerned for each other. Field trips and exchange programs to acquaint children from different neighborhoods with one another in a positive atmosphere will do much to offset the "street lesson" that teaches to hate and fear others who live on a different numbered street.

Role models, peer counseling, rewards, incentives, summer camps, family counseling and other programmatic logistics can be effectively woven into the very fiber of the total home/school community. Effective alternatives to violence and the need for gang affiliation can be taught and learned. Positive manhood needs to be *taught* especially to many of our young men who grow up without daily positive male role models. The school can be the center for change.

The powerlessness of the people at large will continue to exist as long as the collective effort of the community is diluted. The same people who mourned for the dead child have never come together to write letters, visit their local city council office or board of education, or in any way demonstrated collective political power. Thus, is the legacy of poverty. But we must empower our youth with a sense of community consciousness and mutual respect for each other, so that they will be able to do more than pray for the souls of their unborn children who may be murdered in the streets.

We cannot continue to bury children who are killed by children. Otherwise, we are all victims - forever. □

