

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Condemns Violence in VI, Says Slavery has Created Self-Hatred at Home

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Ernice Gilbert **June 02, 2020**



A shooting in Estate Paradise on May 15 ultimately led to the death of a 19-year-old woman who was said to be in search of an apartment with her mother. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan during his coronavirus response update press briefing on Monday opened with remarks to address the crime problem that has dominated headlines in the USVI for years. He spoke briefly about the protests ongoing on the U.S. mainland, and said the same inequalities that have led to what is now taking place across America, were also causing problems in the territory.

"We are all aware of the systemic issues that have created bias and prejudice interactions between the Americans and people of color. This is driven by centuries of slavery, state-sanctioned segregation and racial inequities," Mr. Bryan said.

He added, "While I recognize that slavery and other racial inequities have led to what is playing out on the national forefront in the states, the same characteristics have also created a self-hatred within our community of color that is playing out very lively here at home."

But "racial prejudice doesn't explain why our young men were running around in Oswald Harris Court shooting after each other on a Saturday night. It doesn't explain how a young man can be murdered in broad daylight in downtown Christiansted this Sunday," the governor said.

According to Professor Richard T. Schafer, commenting on Society: Sociological Perspectives in an article published in the [International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences](#), racial prejudice is frequently used to justify keeping a group in a subordinate position such as a lower social class. Conflict theorists, in particular, stress the role of racial and ethnic hostility as a way for the dominant group to keep intact its position of status and power. This approach maintains that even the less-affluent white working class uses prejudice to minimize competition from upwardly mobile minorities, the article says.

Gun violence, including homicides, has been so prevalent in the U.S. Virgin Islands that it has lost some of its shock on many of the territory's residents. So far 23 people have died in the USVI in 2020 through homicides, most people through gun violence.

In the wee hours of Sunday morning (1:46 a.m.), a shootout in the Oswald Harris Court in St. Thomas was caught on tape. The scene showed young men shooting a barrage of rounds back and forth. Police said no one was injured. Then on Sunday afternoon, a man was [shot dead in downtown Christiansted in broad daylight](#), leaving his lifeless body slumped on the floor near the St. Croix Foundation as motorists and passersby watched in dismay.

Mr. Bryan said racial prejudice "doesn't explain why we don't come forward to report these criminals and root out the plague within our own community."

"We must have a dual plan of action that motivates young people of color to run for leadership opportunities not here at home alone but nationwide, and we must have a modus operandi that causes those young people in those positions to implement policy that curbs police brutality and provides economic access to a better way of life for our own citizens," the governor said.

He added, "We must also recognize that ultimately we are all responsible for the communities that we live in and we should be called to action in the same exact way to notify police of suspicious behavior and criminal activity, to correct our family members and friends when they do wrong, and constantly support our civil servants like our teachers, our nurses, and yes even our law enforcement officers.

"See, being a law enforcement officer is a noble calling and we can always use more officers of high integrity to help with this cause. I want to encourage residents that wish to

participate in maintaining the safety and security of our Virgin Islands community to join the ranks of the Virgin Islands Police Department and encourage others around you to do the same.

"There's a lot of things that's going to happen in the next couple of days and weeks, and after all of the burning and the looting and the shooting has stopped, all the same things will be in place unless we as people encourage others to take action. To take to leadership positions, to write policy, join the police force, to encourage others to act up in ways that have long-lasting and permanent change."

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