



## **Black Homicide Victimization in the United States**

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# **Black Homicide Victimization in the United States**

**An Analysis of 2005 Homicide Data**

**January 2008**

**The Violence Policy Center** (VPC) is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public. This report was authored by VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley and VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarmann. This report was funded in part with the support of The Herb Block Foundation and The Joyce Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *License to Kill IV: More Guns, More Crime* (June 2002)
- *The U.S. Gun Industry and Others Unknown—Evidence Debunking the Gun Industry's Claim that Osama bin Laden Got His 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles from the U.S. Afghan-Aid Program* (February 2002)
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- *Kids in the Line of Fire: Children, Handguns, and Homicide* (November 2001)
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- *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001)
- *Hispanics and Firearms Violence* (May 2001)
- *Where'd They Get Their Guns?—An Analysis of the Firearms Used in High-Profile Shootings, 1963 to 2001* (April 2001)
- *A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense* (January 2001)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry's Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

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## Introduction

For black teens and young adults in the United States, homicide is the leading cause of death.<sup>1</sup>

According to 2005 data (the most recent available) from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for black teens and young adults in the age groups 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 34, homicide is the leading cause of death. (The CDC data is the leading federal resource ranking causes of death.) For blacks aged 15 to 24, 42 percent of all deaths (3,077 of 7,371) were homicides. Ninety percent of these homicides were perpetrated with a firearm.

In comparison, homicide was the third leading cause of death for whites in the age groups 15 to 19, and 20 to 24; and the fifth leading cause of death in the age group 25 to 34. For whites aged 15 to 24, 8.5 percent of all deaths (2,172 of 25,410) were homicides. Similarly, 73 percent of these homicides were committed with a firearm.

The devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

This study analyzes unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR)<sup>2</sup> data for black homicide submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).<sup>3</sup> The information used for this report is for the year 2005 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2005 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates, and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicides.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) [cited January 2008]. Available from URL: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars).

<sup>2</sup> In 2005 the state of Florida, as in prior years, did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Data from Florida was not requested individually because the difference in collection techniques would create a bias in the study results. Due to Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana totals do not include data from August through December 2005 from the New Orleans Police Department.

<sup>3</sup> The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program collects basic information on serious crimes from participating police agencies and records supplementary information about the circumstances of homicides in its unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). Submitted monthly, supplementary data consists of: the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of both victims and offenders; the types of weapons used; the relationship of victims to offenders; and, the circumstances of the murders. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, supplementary data are provided on only a subset of homicide cases. Additionally, SHR data are updated throughout the year as homicide reports are forwarded by state UCR programs. This database is a separate database from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data cited above, which is taken from certificates of death and does not include the additional information of the SHR.

## **National Data**

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2005 there were 6,874 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.84 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 5.10 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.99 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes:

### ***Gender***

Of the 6,874 black homicide victims, 5,850 (85 percent) were male, and 1,023 (15 percent) were female. Gender was not recorded for one victim. The homicide rate for black male victims was 34.18 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 8.18 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.43 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 5.45 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 2.09 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.57 per 100,000.

### ***Age***

Five hundred and seventy-eight black homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 145 black homicide victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### ***Most Common Weapons***

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 81 percent of black victims (5,272 out of 6,527) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 76 percent (3,992 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 687 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 278 victims killed by bodily force, and 189 victims killed by a blunt object.

### ***Victim/Offender Relationship***

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 77 percent of black victims (2,321 out of 3,032) were murdered by someone they knew. Seven hundred and eleven victims were killed by strangers.

### ***Circumstance***

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (2,841 out of 3,766) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (1,692 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Eleven percent (322 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Half of these (161 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting.

## State Rankings

In 2005, the national black homicide victimization rate was 18.84 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 32.79 per 100,000 was more than one and a half times the national average for black homicide victims. The remaining states that comprise the top 10 are listed in the chart below. Additional information for each of these 10 states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; type of weapon used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the murder. According to the SHR data, 18 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 18.84 per 100,000. In the top 10 states, for homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (2,168 out of 2,575) were shot and killed with guns. For an alphabetical ranking of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see the chart on pages four and five.

**Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2005, Ranked by Rate**

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	229	32.79
2	Pennsylvania	448	32.14
3	Wisconsin	109	30.49
4	Indiana	169	28.70
5	Michigan	426	28.06
6	California	728	27.05
7	Arkansas	113	25.34
8	Alaska	8	24.87
9	Nevada	50	24.42
10	Maryland	407	24.16

## Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2005

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
18	Alabama	230	18.99
8	Alaska	8	24.87
20	Arizona	43	17.16
7	Arkansas	113	25.34
6	California	728	27.05
22	Colorado	37	16.77
37	Connecticut	41	10.73
36	Delaware	20	11.08
	Florida	NA	NA
34	Georgia	327	11.88
42	Hawaii	3	6.97
27	Idaho	2	15.51
21	Illinois	334	16.78
4	Indiana	169	28.70
41	Iowa	8	9.37
12	Kansas	38	20.73
28	Kentucky	51	15.29
14	Louisiana <sup>4</sup>	297	19.72
45 (tie)	Maine	0	0.00
10	Maryland	407	24.16
26	Massachusetts	77	15.91
5	Michigan	426	28.06
16 (tie)	Minnesota	50	19.40
40	Mississippi	106	9.81
1	Missouri	229	32.79

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<sup>4</sup> Due to Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana totals do not include data from August through December 2005 from the New Orleans Police Department.

### Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2005

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
29	Montana	1	15.20
45 (tie)	Nebraska	0	0.00
9	Nevada	50	24.42
43	New Hampshire	1	5.74
16 (tie)	New Jersey	256	19.40
44	New Mexico	3	5.35
33	New York	479	13.59
32	North Carolina	267	13.82
45 (tie)	North Dakota	0	0.00
11	Ohio	336	23.16
13	Oklahoma	63	20.58
38	Oregon	9	10.27
2	Pennsylvania	448	32.14
19	Rhode Island	14	18.41
30	South Carolina	189	15.03
45 (tie)	South Dakota	0	0.00
15	Tennessee	200	19.46
31	Texas	406	14.64
35	Utah	4	11.65
45 (tie)	Vermont	0	0.00
24	Virginia	255	16.36
39	Washington	28	10.02
23	West Virginia	11	16.63
3	Wisconsin	109	30.49
25	Wyoming	1	16.03
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>6,874</b>	<b>18.84</b>

## Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2005, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 48 percent of all homicide victims.<sup>5</sup> For the age groups 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 34, homicide represents the leading cause of death for blacks in America.

As noted at the beginning of this study, the devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

For blacks, like all victims of homicide, guns—usually handguns—are far and away the number one murder tool. Successful efforts to reduce America's black homicide toll must put a focus on reducing access to firearms.

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<sup>5</sup> FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2005, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

**Appendix One:  
Additional Information for the 10 States with the  
Highest Rates of Black Homicide Victims**



## **Missouri**

*There were 229 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 32.79 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Twenty-six homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 229 homicide victims, 198 were male and 31 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (189 out of 222) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 34 percent (65 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 118 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 16 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 1 victim killed by bodily force, and 13 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 81 percent of victims (63 out of 78) were murdered by someone they knew. Fifteen victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 60 percent (47 out of 78) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 89 percent (42 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Pennsylvania**

*There were 448 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 32.14 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Thirty-eight homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 448 homicide victims, 407 were male and 41 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 83 percent of victims (364 out of 439) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 77 percent (280 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 68 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 40 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 13 victims killed by bodily force, and 11 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 94 percent of victims (149 out of 159) were murdered by someone they knew. Ten victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 60 percent (169 out of 283) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 88 percent (148 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Wisconsin**

*There were 109 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 30.49 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Thirteen homicide victims (12 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (4 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 109 homicide victims, 96 were male and 13 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (90 out of 103) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 51 percent (46 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 39 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 9 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 3 victims killed by bodily force.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 93 percent of victims (26 out of 28) were murdered by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 89 percent (49 out of 55) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 55 percent (27 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Indiana**

*There were 169 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 28.70 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Fifteen homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 28 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 169 homicide victims, 142 were male and 27 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (143 out of 164) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (102 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 24 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 victims killed by bodily force, and 3 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 74 percent of victims (54 out of 73) were murdered by someone they knew. Nineteen victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 77 percent (63 out of 82) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (38 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Michigan**

*There were 426 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 28.06 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Forty homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 426 homicide victims, 380 were male and 46 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (325 out of 372) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 45 percent (146 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 143 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 25 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 6 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 83 percent of victims (96 out of 115) were murdered by someone they knew. Nineteen victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 88 percent (126 out of 143) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (75 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **California**

*There were 728 black homicide victims in California in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in California was 27.05 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Sixty-four homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 15 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 728 homicide victims, 637 were male and 91 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (605 out of 715) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 81 percent (492 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 72 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 49 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 31 victims killed by bodily force, and 15 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 51 percent of victims (188 out of 369) were murdered by someone they knew. One hundred eighty-one victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (375 out of 499) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 49 percent (183 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Arkansas**

*There were 113 black homicide victims in Arkansas in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Arkansas was 25.34 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Twelve homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (5 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 113 homicide victims, 90 were male and 23 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 74 percent of victims (79 out of 107) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (56 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 17 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 17 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 96 percent of victims (53 out of 55) were murdered by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 84 percent (59 out of 70) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 78 percent (46 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Alaska**

*There were 8 black homicide victims in Alaska in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Alaska was 24.87 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

One homicide victim (13 percent) was less than 18 years old. The average age was 26 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 8 homicide victims, 8 were male.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 100 percent of victims (8 out of 8) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (6 victims) were killed with handguns. There was 1 victim killed with a firearm, type not stated.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 83 percent of victims (5 out of 6) were murdered by someone they knew. One victim was killed by a stranger.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 50 percent (4 out of 8) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 25 percent (1 homicide) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Nevada**

*There were 50 black homicide victims in Nevada in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Nevada was 24.42 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Three homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 50 homicide victims, 42 were male and 8 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 69 percent of victims (33 out of 48) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 73 percent (24 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 4 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 87 percent of victims (20 out of 23) were murdered by someone they knew. Three victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (24 out of 35) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 58 percent (14 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Maryland**

*There were 407 black homicide victims in Maryland in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Maryland was 24.16 per 100,000 in 2005*

*Ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Twenty-three homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 10 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 407 homicide victims, 364 were male and 43 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (332 out of 397) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 95 percent (317 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 5 victims killed with a firearm, type not stated. There were 40 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 11 victims killed by bodily force, and 12 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 69 percent of victims (62 out of 90) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-eight victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 76 percent (69 out of 91) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 62 percent (43 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **United States**

*There were 6,874 black homicide victims in the United States in 2005*

*The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.84 per 100,000 in 2005*

### **Age**

Five hundred and seventy-eight homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 145 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 6,874 homicide victims, 5,850 were male and 1,023 were female. Gender was not recorded for one victim.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 81 percent of victims (5,272 out of 6,527) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 76 percent (3,992 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 902 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 687 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 278 victims killed by bodily force, and 189 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 77 percent of victims (2,321 out of 3,032) were murdered by someone they knew. Seven hundred and eleven victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (2,841 out of 3,766) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (1,692 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.