



The UMOJA Constellation of Services

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The House of UMOJA is a nonprofit 501c3 organization located in West Philadelphia, North of Market Street and South of Lancaster Avenue, in the Carroll Park neighborhood of Philadelphia. It is registered to conduct business in the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Established in 1968, the House of Umoja, Inc. is an internationally acclaimed institution that has, for five decades, designed and implemented timeless Global Models for eradicating violence, fostering community development, creating economic sustainability, and addressing many of the key challenges that prevent boys and adolescent males from reaching their full potential and maturing into productive and successful adults. Its successful track record of positively transforming the lives of approximately 3,000 male adolescents and reducing gang violence, moved universities and institutions to seek the House of Umoja, Inc.'s expertise. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention and the Center for Disease Control were among the institutions that sought the House of Umoja, Inc.'s expertise on gang violence reduction, youth programming, and community organizing. Former United States Presidents The Honorable James Earl Carter, Jr. and the late Honorable Ronald Wilson Reagan recognized the House of Umoja, Inc. for its pioneering work that has been documented in published articles such as "A Summons To Life," by Robert Woodson of the American Enterprise Institute (www.aei.org) in 1981 and "The Violent Juvenile Offender," by Paul DeMuro and Richard Allison of the National Council On Crime and Delinquency (www.nccdglobal.org), in 1984.

The House of Umoja began operating in Philadelphia during the 1970's as a unique grassroots program initiated by community residents David and Falaka Fattah (National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, 1999; see also Woodson, 1981, 1986, 1998). Using their own resources and their home as a base of operations, they created this family-centered community institution that effectively mediated gang conflicts and came to serve as a source of counsel and individual development for neighborhood gang and nongang youth. The family model "provides a sense of belonging, identity, and self-worth that was previously sought through gang membership" (National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, 1999:59). Through reparenting and providing role models, the House of Umoja has "successfully transformed more than 3,000 frightened, frustrated, and alienated young minority males into self-assured, competent, concerned, and productive citizens" (National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, 1999:16).

House of Umoja Overview

“A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.” –African Proverb

The House of Umoja is a 56 year old non-profit organization that uses the nucleus of family, kinship of community, culture, education (STEAM and life skills), agriculture and nutrition, to continue to reduce violence evident among at-risk and under-served youth and their families while maintaining sanctuary and mobilizing and empowering community.

Established in 1968, the House of UMOJA, an internationally acclaimed institution, has for 56 years designed and implemented timeless global models for eradicating violence, fostering community development, creating economic sustainability, and addressing many of the key challenges that prevent boys and adolescent males from reaching their full potential and maturing into productive adults. It's successful track record of transforming and working with youths has moved universities and institutions that include, but are not limited to, the Office of Juvenile Justice and prevention and the Center for Disease Control, to seek the expertise of Queen Mother Falaka Fattah and her husband, the late Mr. David Fattah in the areas of gang reduction, youth programming, and community organizing. Former United States Presidents Jimmy Carter and the late Ronald Regan have recognized the House of Umoja, Inc. for its pioneering work which has been documented in published articles such as "A Summons To Life" by Robert Woodson of the American Enterprise Institute and "The Violent Juvenile Offender" by Paul DeMuro and Richard Allison of the National Council and Delinquency in 1984. The House of UMOJA has brokered peace and invested in the future by creating lifelines that positively transformed the trajectory of the lives of at least 3,000 adolescent males.

"Imagine an urban inner-city campus where young people ages 12 to 25 become the moral equivalent to antibodies. Imagine youth who are trained as Peace Ambassadors to help end violence in their communities while realizing their own potential within an environment that is culturally rich and educationally relevant. Imagine these youth having this experience on a campus that is a replica of one of the most beautiful cities in the world, the ancient African city of Djennè. Imagine a place where students also learn Aquaponics, Aviation, Web 3 Technologies, and Coding. Securing the future of the community requires an educated, motivated, and non-violent workforce. To do so the work must begin with our youth while providing opportunities for community participation." –Queen Mother Falaka Fattah, President & CEO



House of Umoja Overview

Today the focal point of the House of Umoja is the development of the Fattah Peace Academy & Campus. As men study war; we study peace. This development is the renovation of buildings and lots owned by the House of Umoja on the 1400 block of N. Frazier Street (Queen Mother Falaka Fattah Way) in the 19th police district in West Philadelphia. The academy will house a community campus consisting of a state-of-the-art MakersLab & Entrepreneurial Hub, an aquaponic fed urban farm with roof-top gardens, transitional housing for returning citizens, guest housing for visiting faculty, speakers, and artists, along with classrooms, meeting and co-working space. The academy will facilitate a global peace think tank and educational programs geared to the empowerment of African Americans from ages 12 and up. The **UMOJA INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY** in conjunction with the physical development project helps pave the way for the peace academy by maintaining sanctuary while cultivating evidence-based programming, a culture of peace, and supportive community:

WHO WE SERVE

Underserved and underrepresented low to mid income communities in Philadelphia:
Ages

- 12-18 ; predominately African American;
- 26-45 Activists & Artists (community activists; public officials, all genres of music and all categories of artists); 82% African American; 7% Hispanic; 5% Caribbean American; 2% Asian American; 4% Caucasian
- 46+ Community stakeholders, public officials, seniors, retirees, old gang members
- local/global: students, professionals, organizations in the areas of violence prevention, social work, peace, Black male adolescent and community development



YOUTH AND VIOLENCE: THE CURRENT CRISIS

HEARING **BEFORE THE** **SELECT COMMITTEE ON** **CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES** **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES** **ONE HUNDREDTH CONGRESS** **SECOND SESSION**

HEARING HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 9, 1988

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In the schools, the problem with the schools is you took the discipline out, getting child abuse mixed up with discipline. You have to discipline children. Now, any time a child knows that they cannot be disciplined they're going to act up. They're going to do what they want to do. So, you have to come up with some kind of solution where a child cannot tell a teacher, "If you hit me, I'm going to put you on charges (If child abuse.)"

Now, it's up to you to learn. The teacher cannot make you learn. You have to learn yourself. I gang-warred for ten years. The teachers told me I wouldn't live to be 18. I'm 34. So, every year I go back to the high school and let them know I'm here another year, and I'm going to college for five years. I know if I wouldn't have met Sister Fattah in '72, I probably would be dead or in the penitentiary for the rest of my life.

But, I'm saying nobody in any city or any state can fight any gang. The best thing to do is try to work along with them. You have to tell them not to be like you were, to be like you are now. Every young gang member has somebody that was their idol from the past and they're trying to be like that person. So, you have to take your time and sit down and say, don't be like we were, be like we are now.

You need, as far as cocaine and the gangs, cocaine used to be a rich man's high and now it's a poor man's high. What public welfare needs to do is start checking on these welfare people who trade these food stamps in for cocaine and spend their checks on cocaine instead of their children and paying their bills and stuff.

You should go around when they get their food stamps and check the refrigerators and see whose refrigerators are filled and whose are empty and you'll know whose on drugs. When young kids come home with gold on all their fingers and all over their neck, then the parent in that house is condoning that because they have to know what they're doing.

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Now, I heard a young guy say earlier that they should be locked up. All young people shouldn't be locked up. A lot of them are mis-directed. So, what you should do is not allow them to go through the juvenile system 100 times. When they come there three times, then that's when you're going to have to put your foot down and deal with them. If you let them go through there 100 times, of course they're going to keep on doing it and think they can get over. Somebody is going to have to deal with them right then and there. Not saying, "Lock them up," because if you lock some of them up, then they get institutionalized and then they use that.

When I went to jail, one thing I found was that all the gangs that we were fighting stuck together. If we were from West Philly, we stuck together. If we were from North Philly, we stuck together. If you were from South Philly, you stuck together. So, I said to myself, "If I can do that in here, I'm going back out on the street and do it."

Nobody ever told me what a human life meant. Until I met Sister Fattah, I didn't care about shooting or killing anybody. Then, she told me only God's supposed to take a human life. Then, you've got to get these churches more in violence. When I was younger, the reverends would get out there on the street with us and walk with us and talk with us and go to the police station with us. They don't do that any more.

So, then you take five or ten years to deal with a problem. Young people have to realize that there are people out there who are trying to make money off them. So, they want them to gang fight. They want them to kill. Then, you are giving a lot of programs money that are not working. You should have some young people sitting right up there with you making decisions for young people. Ask them which programs are working, which programs should get funded.

At House of Umoja, we don't get paid. In all the years I've been there, 15 years, dealing with gang problems. Every month, every week, we're dealing with a gang problem that other people are getting paid for. We have one thing they don't. A young life means more to us than a paycheck. That's what a lot of other people have to start doing, stop thinking about that paycheck and getting paid and think about saving one of those kids lives. You save one out of 100 and that's more than a million dollars.

I wish that you would get some kind of a group together that everybody could bring their resources together and just go to different cities and help each other out. That's all we could do. But, trying to get rid of the gangs, when gangs are fighting nothing moves, drugs, numbers, nothing moves, and that's why people are manipulating them to do the drugs, sell drugs.

So, you have to get on the parents and the young people. I just thank God that they sent Sister Fattah before I got killed or went to jail for the rest of my life. She helped me go on to college for five years. She showed me that I had leadership potential to use in a positive way, not a negative way. So, since I was part of the problem,

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I'm going to always try to be part of the solution now. Because, there's going to always be young people killing

young people.

So, that's all I have to say. Thank you.

[prepared statement of Sister Falaka Fattah follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SISTER FALAKA FATTAH, DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, HOUSE OF UMOJA, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the subject of youth violence. In defining the problem I remember former Attorney General Ramsey Clark's remarks on the root cause of the problem. "In every major city in the United States you will find that two-thirds of the arrests take place among only about two percent of the population. Where is that area in every city? Well, its in the same place where infant mortality is four times higher than in the city as a whole; where the death rate is 25 percent higher; where life expectancy is ten years shorter; where communicable diseases with the potential of physical and mental damage are six and eight and ten times more frequent; where alcoholism and drug addiction are prevalent to a degree far transcending that of the rest of the city; where education is poorest-the oldest buildings, the most crowded and turbulent schoolrooms, the fewest certified teachers, the highest rate of dropouts; where the average formal schooling is four to six years less than for the city as a whole. Further causes would include: family violence, i.e. child abuse, battered wives, etc. In America there are an estimated 86 million families in which 5,000 wives per day are beaten. Witness to and sometimes co-victims are the children who therefore learn very clearly to accept violence as a part of daily life. This is your training ground for youth violence both individual and collective. Youth use violence to resolve conflict. If we are to save them and us, we must change our violent society. Between 1820 and 1943 a man killed another person every 86 seconds. today a child kills another child every day; They haven't caught up with us yet. but they are making the effort.

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Since violence is a learned trait, we must do as Michael Jackson says, "Look at the man in the mirror". At the House of Umoja Boystown we are attempting to intervene in the lives of these high risk. violence prone youth and re-direct them. We began this journey twenty years ago when I discovered that one of my sons was a gang member.

Beyond reason I have always loved my son Robin. He is the second in a family of six boys and was born when I was just twenty-one years old. The night before his birth I had been watching a particularly brutal boxing match on television. I have always found violence repulsive and my premature labor pains started just as the losing fighter was counted out. It was a prophetic beginning. My first husband. an army sergeant, stationed on base in another state. was not at home. My mother, stepfather and three-year-old son were sleeping in their bedrooms when I quietly left in a taxicab to go to the hospital alone. Shortly after 1:00 pm the next day, a five-pound Robin was born, while in the background I could hear the strains of the 1953 record "The Little White Cloud That Cried" from a distant hospital radio. That haunting, plaintive song was the prelude to my unbridled love for this baby and the beginning of the House of UMOJA Boystown which actually came into being sixteen years later in 1969. It also signaled the start of a lifelong battle with American street violence and its cause; boys and men who are too quick to fight and kill each other.

I named the baby Robin after the baseball player Robin Roberts; as a nonviolent sports fan. I find ball playing preferable to boxing. But, Robin himself didn't take to playing baseball, basketball, or football. As a boy he instinctively loved to fight. At the age of ten or eleven he would come home bruised and disheveled and happily report that he had had a great time! What that really meant was that he had been fighting.

We lived on a block which formed a dividing line between a welfare-supported, lower-class neighborhood and a middle-class working district. Robin always chose his close friends from the poorer side. He always wanted to share his toys with boys who had nothing - not even a father. I guessed it made him feel important in a family blessed with talent, intelligence, and a middle-class income. But none of this maternal understanding prepared me for the revelation which came when Robin turned sixteen years old.

It was my second husband who told me the truth. He had discovered that Robin was an active gang member in our home town of Philadelphia, a town where gang members killed each other forty-five times in that year alone. While I sat stunned at the news, my husband went on to explain what he knew from his own experience as a former gang member; that I couldn't deal with Robin as an individual. I had to deal with his group because he now had more loyalty to his group than to his family.

And so, in a desperate effort to save Robin's life, I invited his gang division of fifteen boys to live with our family; to my surprise they accepted the invitation. That act set us firmly on the path to caring for over 1,000 boys between 1969 and 1988, because the fifteen original boys were gradually followed by 200 others who came of their own accord, and 800 who were sent by the court.

These 1,000 new "sons" have each come with individual and group needs, stayed for varying periods of time, and then left to make room for new boys. America is the most violent of all the Western nations even though the seeds of violence can be found in every human being in the world. Gang violence in Philadelphia, the city where America was born, can be traced back to 1791, when waves of European immigrants arrived to start a new life. By

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1840 various ethnic groups were fighting for turf and inscribing their names on neighborhood walls. Those gangs were armed with sling-shots, pistols and knives, and they often caused riots that ended in arson, shooting and murder.

The gang problem has been found all over the world, from England, Japan and Germany, to Austria, Scotland and Russia. In America there have been gangs drawn from members of every ethnic group - Polish, Irish, Jewish, Italian,

Puerto Rican, Chinese, Mexican-American, native Indian, and African-American. Often they were motivated by deprivation. In Philadelphia violence clashes between youths of African-American descent rose sharply after the youngsters saw the political and social gains of the 1960's being taken away in the 1970's. By 1973, Philadelphia's homicide rate for black males between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had risen to 10 for every 100,000 black residents.

In June 1969 I asked my husband, David Fattah, to research the black gang culture so we could understand what moved these youths to violence. The study was completed before we asked Robin's gang to come and live with us and was the foundation on which the invitation was made. The research revealed that the origins of black gangs lay in the second great migration of black people from the rural South to the urban North, the black trek which took place in 1945, at the end of World War II. They came north to Philadelphia to escape the poverty and racism of the south, the legacy of slavery. Usually the men came north, first, to find jobs and settle in. As money became available they would send for the rest of the family. At that time it was customary for blacks newly arrived in Philadelphia to head straight for South Street, a traditional block on the south side of the city about which a saying developed; "Walk South Street and find a friend." The friend they found would be someone from home, a "home boy."

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As time went on, within the gang culture, the word home boy was shortened to "hommie". The hommie would assist the new-comer to find a place to live and a place to work. He could also be counted on to fight in case of trouble. From this arrangement developed living patterns that ensured that clusters of home folks or kin folks lived together in specific neighborhoods. Originally, black people from Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida all chose to live in different sections either according to the

name of a street or, if the gang had power ambitions, they called the streets nations, such as "Zulu Nation" or "Congo Nation." Consequently, a traditional Philadelphia black street gang was composed of friends who lived in the same neighborhood and usually had kinship links developed over generations with ties to the South. Many of these traditional gangs were founded by families, since recruitment took place at funerals where families and friends gathered in mourning. It was easier to acquire new followers when emotions were aroused over the death of a gang member. In contrast to white gangs, which has motorcycles, these black youths were usually not mobile. Black gangs had less money than white gangs and so they usually kept to their ground, their "turf", socialized with each other and drank wine or watched movies and television when they were not involved in gang wars or making court appearances. Their fascination with the media resulted in many gang members adopting street names from Hollywood gangster movies featuring James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart. Bogart in particular, so fascinated the gang youth that they included him in their language. "Bogart" in street talk is a verb meaning "force your way past obstacles". The names chosen or given to gang members usually gave a clear indication of their personalities or skills. Thus a name like "Killer," "Shotgun," or

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"Craze," meant exactly what it suggested. Gangs were broken down by age into a rigid hierarchical system: those arsenals included shotguns, knives, car aerials, broom handles, boards and fire bombs. Orders for gang wars were usually issued as a result of complaints from Junior or Seniors, and after being sanctioned by the Old Heads. Some orders were issued from prisons which housed the Old Heads.

Robin's gang was called Clymer Street and he was one of the leaders, or "runners" of the Juniors. This division of Clymer Street was named the "Dark Angels," and Robin shared command of the division with two other boys, Bird and Sam. By virtue of their roles as leaders, these three boys were also targets for rival gangs 13th and South Streets, which had a combined membership of 300, and 20th and Carpenter Streets which has 250 members. Therefore, 550 boys might have reason to kill my son.

The Pee Wees beneath The Dark Angels were called "The Little Wheels of Soul and included Robin's younger brother Arthur, who liked to call himself "Little Robin." In order for The Little Wheels of Soul to graduate to the status of the Dark Angels, they had to undergo three tests involving loyalty, fighting and drinking. To prove loyalty, the prospective gang member would have to walk through a rival gang's turf; fighting involved boxing with the Dark Angels and holding your own drinking until the person almost passed out. 10 to 14 years olds, 15 to 18 years olds, 18 to 21 years olds, and 21 and older, respectively, Pee Wees, Juniors, Seniors, and Old Heads. Only the older divisions were permitted to buy and keep weapons.

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The role model for my son's Clymer Street gang was a gang named "The Savage Seven". The great attraction of this group was that even though they were black, they owned motorcycles. Also, even though they resided in a poor black area eleven blocks away, The Savage Seven claimed a white area, Rittenhouse Square, as part of their turf. Rittenhouse Square looks just like a European Park. It's centered in an affluent white neighborhood and peopled by the idle rich and professionals While live in stately high rise apartment buildings. Around the park was land claimed by a black gang. So the residents quietly walked their dogs, planned art shows and admired the flowers, while around them street youth played their deadly war games.

However, since the Clymer Street gang didn't have motorcycles, they settled for bikes and developed a specialty for stealing them. They could take apart and reassemble bikes in minutes and were skilled, fast riders who were adroit in getting away from the police. They used these bikes to peddle their way into my heart and my home. At the start of our arrangement we had to establish rules to live by. I asked three of the boys to form a committee which would report back to the group. The rules they came up with were approved and have stood the test of time. Very simply they are:

1. No fighting among the residents.
2. Resolve conflicts through discussions.
3. Fifty push-ups for being high on drink or drugs.
4. No girls in the bedroom.
5. Collective decision making.
6. No stealing.

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7. 10 pm curfew.
8. No weapons in the home.
9. Shared work and responsibility.
10. Communal spending based on the needs of the group.
11. No gang warring.
12. Tell the truth in house discussions. In return for following these rules the boys get a place to sleep, regular meals, a ten dollar a week allowance, and freedom from jailor public institutions. Most important of all, they get a sense of belonging to a family that cares. The boys themselves say they learn to take responsibility for their own lives, to respect themselves and to stand on their own two feet. The schzme worked. There was sanctuary and harmony inside our home, which became known as "The House of UMOJA."

Umoja is a swahili word meaning Unity. Our contentment lasted from 1969 to 1972, during which time boys came and left on their own. None of them returned to gang warring, but gang wars continued to take the lives of young people throughout the city at an alarming rate. In 1972 the city administration appealed to gang members to turn in their weapons. Gangs had in their possession thousands of shotguns and automatics. Some had even obtained high-powered rifles. We didn't believe they would give up their guns and we were fearful of the consequences since the new mayor, Frank Rizzo, had won his job by campaigning on law and order. A former police commissioner, he had a rough reputation. Because of our fears of the mayor's reaction if the youths refused to give up their weapons, we launched a series of gang conferences in an attempt to negotiate peace agreements. At each conference recurrent themes were expressed. The boys wanted jobs, respect, decent recreational opportunities, and understanding, but they

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themselves had no respect for or understanding of the value of human life. They were hopeless but aggressive, and their tolerance for frustration was small. We found that they were used by everyone. They were exploited by politicians to get elected and by government and social agencies to get money. We found that gang youth had become an economic base for the greedy and an escape value for the racist. However, we also found a need for love and a willingness to communicate. In 1973 we decided to visit gang members in prisons throughout the entire state to solicit their support in planning a final conference which developed into an all-out campaign to end gang wars. That final conference was held on January 1, 1974, with thirty-two gangs in attendance. One of the most significant agreements to come from that meeting was a peace between the Valley and Norris Street gangs. Traditional enemies for generations, they had been responsible for four gang deaths in 1973. We chalked up another success four days after the conference during a private meeting between the Zulu Nation and 8th and Diamond Streets Gangs at the House of Umoja. Their agreement was written on the "No Gang War Poater", which became the symbol of the campaign. This poster was presented to the state governor on January 8th, 1974, and he responded by ordering every state store in Philadelphia to display the poster. The struggle for peace agreements continued throughout the year with meetings held in schools, police stations, and even camp sites. Hundreds of people became involved. Apparently, it was an idea whose time had come, and the young people responded positively to the outpouring of attention they so badly needed. No one person or organization deserves the credit for the campaign's success since it involved total community's effort,

but because of this explosion of love, gang deaths declined from thirty-two deaths to one between

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1974 and 1977.

Today we are building an Urban Boystown in memory of this declaration of love and to provide a permanent refuge for street kids who are still dying from poor education, high unemployment, crime, drugs, and high risk life-styles.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, nearly one million young people drop out of high school annually. Nationwide approximately one out of every four ninth graders will not graduate from high school and, in some urban areas, the drop-out rate approaches 50 percent. One out of every 17 year-olds in this country is functionally illiterate. More than 573,000 babies are born to teenage mothers each year, and half of these young women will not complete high school. Moreover, teenage pregnancy is often associated with long-term poverty, health defects and other types of problems. An alarming number of young people use alcohol, and a high percentage are users of drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. A 1986 survey of high school seniors found that more than 65 percent of the youth surveyed were current users of marijuana and more than 6 percent were current users of cocaine. Automobile accidents, homicides and suicides, respectively constitute the three leading causes of death among adolescents.

I have found through experience that the devastating difference between youth of the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's is the availability of cocaine and the increased availability of guns.

According to "Justicia" newsletter of the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, "the street price of cocaine has fallen from \$600 per gram in the early 80's to \$70 - \$100 per gram today.

The increase in urban murders across the country in the past two years has been attributed to the rise in cocaine.

Victim rights activist, Karen Kurst-Swanger claims that, "violent crime

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occurs every 24 seconds, every 28 minutes a murder is committed. Every six minutes a woman is raped and every three seconds a property crime is committed."

This sub-culture of violence is creating a moral and spiritual crisis in America Today.

To change things we must find a way to stop the flow of drugs, unlearn criminal behavior, dispel the lingering tolerance for violence and de-romanticize it.

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