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Yale workers return home to city's violence

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By [Everett Rosenfeld](#)

Staff Reporter

Thursday, September 8, 2011

New Haven's murder rate this year is the highest since 1994, but the vast majority of the homicides have plagued

streets and neighborhoods that most Yalies have never heard of, let alone visited.

But the violence can hit home for another part of the University community.

Antoine Ward is a Davenport College dining hall employee who has lived his whole life in the West Hills area of the city. He calls it the "Wild Wild West."

"When I was a kid, I used to cry when someone I knew was killed, but it's normal now," he said, sitting in the Davenport dining hall, just after his dinner shift ended.

Ward said that he personally knew at least 15 of the 25 people killed in New Haven this year. The city's most recent murder victim, 25-year-old Timothy Mathis, was found only two blocks from Ward's home on Taylor Avenue.

In his experience living in West Hills, Ward said he has observed that feelings of revenge incite the majority of killings between young people: jealousy over anything from a stolen girlfriend to a new job could be reason enough to kill.

"[Some New Haven residents] get into a state of mind that we're in the jungle," Ward said. "you're ready to die at any minute, so you're also ready to take anyone's life too."

Another Yale dining employee shared a similar outlook. This employee, who wished to remain anonymous citing employment concerns, told the News that a family member was recently shot and killed, but that "you get used to it."

The crime that some Yale employees are experiencing near their homes may not have leaked onto campus, but it has exploded onto the city's political scene as one of the major election issues.

At a joint press conference for three mayoral candidates Wednesday afternoon, Mayor John DeStefano Jr.'s three challengers continued their sharp criticism of the mayor's handling of the crime situation.

Budget watchdog Jeffrey Kerekes, civil rights activist Clifton Graves and former aldermen Tony Dawson gathered press and supporters on the New Haven Green and called for both DeStefano and New Haven Police Department Chief Frank Limon to be replaced. Kerekes, who lives in the city's Wooster Square neighborhood, told the News Wednesday night that he feels safe near his house despite a dead body being discovered three blocks away last week, but added that he understands many communities do not have the luxury of safety.

Ward blamed the city's education system, among other factors, for the violence. Kerekes agreed, adding that only 51 percent of children graduate high school in the Elm City, and that he believes DeStefano is to blame for the state of the education system.

"We've got a generation of kids who have been failed by this mayor," Kerekes said.

But while his opponents attacked his record, DeStefano defended his handling of New Haven crime.

In 1994 — the last time New Haven had more than 25 murders — the city saw 16,000 Part 1 (serious) crimes, he said, and that number dropped to 9,200 last year. The mayor added that he expects the Part 1 figure to decrease again in 2011.

"Anyone who wants to use crime statistics to talk about the chief or my leadership needs to acknowledge that," DeStefano said of the overall decrease in crime, adding that many of the murders are taking place between individuals with prior convictions.

DeStefano added that the police department has made approximately 20 arrests in connection with the city's homicides, but NHPD Spokesman Joseph Avery did not return requests to verify this number.

DeStefano has cited this reason before when explaining New Haven crime, and although he told the News that the city has "had to deal with a state administration that denied they were discharging people back unprepared until they were caught on film doing it," his administration has not announced any recent progress or new initiatives to

address its reentry problem.

DeStefano and the NHPD estimate that approximately 25 felons are released back into the city every week.

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I appreciate the YDN trying to highlight these issues, but let's consider the facts. Most workers go home to neighborhoods that are extremely safe, and have not seen a single homicide for many years. This is an issue that is localized to a few high-poverty areas that, relative to most other US cities, are quite small in both area and population.

I don't see the Columbia University paper doing an article about their employees' neighborhoods, even though New York City reported 45 shootings just over the past weekend alone.

Yale workers come from the entire New Haven labor market area, which is one of the safest urban areas in the country. New Orleans, for example, which has a population and land area that is almost exactly identical to that of the New Haven labor market (ie about 350,000 people within a couple mile radius of the center), had nearly 200 homicides last year, giving it a homicide rate almost 10 times higher than New Haven.

It is sure that some workers and students are impacted by this issue, but your suggestion that most workers live in areas that are less safe than where students or faculty live is simply unfounded.

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