

PRESS RELEASE

Lessons From Grand Bay: Prospects For Maintaining Low Crime In Dominica, Nature Island Of The Caribbean

by

[Dr. Peter K.B. St. Jean](#)

Buffalo, NY – July 12, 2006. On November 1st 2005, during an early morning confrontation between some residents from the rural Caribbean village of Grand Bay, Dominica, and members the Drug Squad of the Commonwealth of Dominic Police force, a 25 year old villager, Hilarion Baron, was killed by a bullet. For several days thereafter, it was difficult for outsiders, even utility workers, to visit Grand Bay. Those unrests prompted the Grand Bay Village Council to take action to restore peace and order in that community of about 4000 residents. Grand Bay had already earned a reputation as a community which produces many productive and talented citizens, but one also confronted by several historical and contemporary unrests that include slave revolts, a census riot, and uprisings against perceived unfair land ownership and practices.

At the time that Hilarion Baron was killed, current University at Buffalo Assistant Professor of Sociology, Dr. Peter K. B. St. Jean, was pursuing his MA degree in Criminology at Simon Fraser University, Canada. He was actively seeking a thesis project that would contribute towards peace and improved quality of life in his native country, Dominica. After learning about the unrests in Grand Bay, St. Jean immediately contacted the Grand Bay Village Council for permission to conduct his thesis project in that village and use its findings to assist that community and the police to find workable solutions to their problems. Permission was granted to conduct what St. Jean later called the Grand Bay Area Neighborhood Study (GANS).

In 1996, St. Jean traveled to Dominica and lived in Grand Bay while he conducted six months of intensive ethnographic research on the sources and consequences of community and police confrontations in that village.

His major findings indicated that while both residents and their police wanted a safer Grand Bay for all, they disagreed on the methods to accomplish that goal. The police primarily focused on heavy-handed techniques while the residents craved for closer informal interactions with the police so that barriers of misunderstandings could be reduced, and both factions could collaborate for a safer community. Residents believed that the police functioned as an outside force existing to oppress them, while police perceived many of the residents as anti-authority and anti-police, willing to defy all that is orderly. Meanwhile, both residents and the police relished over some good working relationships that they share from time to time.

The research methods included focus groups with youth, adults, elder, police, community workers and other stakeholders in Grand Bay. Each week, St. Jean's

ethnography included several hours of discussion and interaction with many of the men on Block 44 that were perceived to be a major part of that community's problems. According to St. Jean, at the end of the research, a high level police official told him that he had already told his men to prepare a body bag for St. Jean with the expectation that he would not return from Grand Bay alive.

That police expectation did not come true and instead, towards the end of the research, St. Jean managed to work with both factions to devise a plan of action to resolve their confrontations. From that process emerged the Grand Bay Community Policing Program that was implemented on January 1st 1997.

In 1998, St. Jean returned to Dominica to conduct the year-one evaluation of that program. The evaluation findings indicated that while the program was implemented only to about 47% of its capacity, it has realized 69% of its expected signs of progress. Serious crime in Grand Bay had declined by about 26% while residents had also expressed increased willingness to intervene informally and report crimes to the police. However, by the year 2000, the Grand Bay Community Policing Program was discontinued, and St. Jean explains in the book the major forces which influenced its demise.

The efforts in Grand Bay prompted interests in an island-wide implementation of community policing in Dominica. This wish has not been materialized over the last 10 years, and St. Jean explains why this is the case. He also provides information about a 2003 Dominica Crime Symposium which led to the formation of a National Crime Prevention and Control Policy that was adopted by the Roosevelt Skerrit Cabinet on May 9th 2006. St. Jean's research on crime and the Dominica economy was the lead paper for that policy.

In *Lessons From Grand Bay*, St. Jean provides seven major recommendations for maintaining peace and order on that Caribbean paradise, and addresses the implications beyond Grand Bay and Dominica.

In his foreword to *Lessons from Grand Bay*, Chairman of the Grand Bay village Council, Willie Fevrier wrote:

It is not often that the efforts of a small village community at resolving its problems receive the attention of an academic, with a view to arriving at solutions based on the analysis of the relevant issues. Nor is it commonplace for such research to be documented in a book to which reference could be made by the community authorities and those of other communities with similar issues to deal with. Therefore, we in Grand Bay could count ourselves very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to be examined on the issue of community safety and its ramifications and implications during a specific time period.

As the author states, the book is not intended to be a documentary of the events that took place during a rather turbulent period in the lives of Grand Bay people in the 1990s. What it does is it looks at the relationships that existed between entities that would normally impact on community safety with a view to identifying the

strengths and weaknesses of these relationships. Upon this analysis, it arrives at strategies that would strengthen community safety and reduce the incidence of crime and violence.

Some of the recommendations arising from the study are quite imaginative. For example, the role identified for “community safety persons”, the changing role of the police in the context of community policing are two such mechanisms which I thought were quite creative.

It is always difficult to attribute a sense of community safety to any particular program unless a thorough study is done. However, for what it is worth, the issue of community policing has remained on the agenda of the police and government and I believe that the research conducted in Grand Bay and documented here would have had some effect in ensuring that it continues to be on their agenda particularly when the entire country is concerned about crime and violence.

The foreword by Dominica Police Commissioner, Mathias D. Lestrade is as follows:

I agree with Willie Fevrier’s statement in his foreword to this book – that Grand Bay is fortunate to have been selected as the site for the joint research effort which led to the first implementation of a community policing program in Dominica. We in the Commonwealth of Dominica Police Force feel equally blessed to have played a major role in the process. As the Force continues in its efforts to serve and protect the Dominica public in ways that suit the demands of modern society, we embrace the opportunities to collaborate with other national stakeholders to reach our goals.

Similar to my two immediate predecessors, I have had the pleasure of working closely with Dominica’s own Sociologist and Criminologist, Dr. St. Jean, as he continues to make important contributions to enhance quality of life in our nation and elsewhere. The community-police-scholarly collaboration that is reflected in this book is a good example of the sort of partnership that the Force views as an important ingredient for maintaining low crime in Dominica.

The community policing efforts made in Grand Bay have provided important lessons and serve as a good foundation in our efforts to implement a national community policing model in Dominica. As Dr. St. Jean explains in the book, the implementation of community policing is much more difficult than it appears on the surface. Therefore, I am counting on the assistance of all stakeholders as we arrive at more advanced stages of this effort.

It is good that members of the Force who were interviewed ten years ago felt free to express exactly what was on their minds. This reflects part of the freedoms that we all enjoy in this organization. However, I hope that some of the more sensitive statements are read in context of the realities of 10 years ago. They may not necessarily reflect current sentiments in the Dominica Police Force.

Finally, now that the Government of Dominica has adopted a national policy for crime control, I wish that the recommendations from this book, as well as that of the policy, will soon be implemented to further unite different stakeholders in our society for the purpose of enjoying even lower crime in Dominica.

In his review of the book, Dominica native and Justice in the Ontario, Canada Court of Justice, Irving André, wrote:

This book is a tremendous contribution to the discourse on crime and prevention in Dominica. As the island's leaders battle the deleterious effects of globalization, rampant drug use, unemployment and the proliferation of gangs, Dr. St. Jean provides a blueprint for the resolution of many of these problems with the implementation of a well orchestrated program of community based policing.

Dr. Peter K.B. St. Jean is a Dominica-born Criminologist and Sociologist and is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Buffalo. He is a member of the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS), the Stop the Violence Coalition in Buffalo, the Buffalo Local Action Committee, and P.E.A.C.E. His second book, *Pockets of Crime: Broken Windows, Collective Efficacy and the Criminal Point of View* (forthcoming University of Chicago Press June 2007) is based on 4.5 years of ethnographic research in Wentworth, one of the most violent police districts in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. St. Jean completed his undergraduate studies at Essex County College, NJ; St. John's University, NY; and Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan. His MA in Criminology was completed in 1997 at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada; and his Ph.D. was earned in 2002 at the University of Chicago, Department of Sociology.

Lessons from Grand Bay will be officially launched in Dominica on at 6:00pm on July 27th 2006 at the Old Fort in Grand Bay. Subsequently, readings and book signings will be conducted at the Dominica Police Headquarters at 2:30pm on July 28th and at St. Jean's home community, Trafalgar, on August 3rd 2006. Proceeds from the sale of each book will go towards various Youth Development and Quality of Life funds that St. Jean has initiated as a way to provide seed monies for community-based crime reduction efforts.

After July 17th *Lessons from Grand Bay* will be available from the University at Buffalo Bookstore, the website of the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS), and elsewhere. It will be available in Dominica bookstores after July 27th 2006.

The book is published by Pond Casse Press, a Dominica-owned community-based press affiliate of the University of Toronto Press.

[Back to Policy, Politics & Society](#)