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# OPINION

## Symptom of a Much Bigger Problem

### Mayor falls short in response to gang violence

BY SHARDE NABORS

Dear Mayor Hales,

I am writing you to express my concern about gang violence in the beautiful city of Portland. Today I read a news story that quoted you saying gang violence is a "public safety and a public health crisis." You called upon the community to do their part to stop the shootings that have plagued Outer Northeast and Southeast as well as North Portland. However, I would like to call upon you to evaluate how effectively you do your part.

Now, I will agree that we all have a part to play. I personally play the part of mother to my two children and will do all that I can to keep them away from gangs and violence. The part that you must play – that you chose to play – is as a leader. So, forgive me for putting the onus on you. You signed up for the job and as a Portland citizen, I expect you to do it.



When I hear of shootings in these troubled areas of town, I wonder how they are even possible. I know how "dangerous" these neighborhoods are. The poverty levels in these parts of town are higher than in others and I know that poverty often leads to crime and violence. So, why aren't they being patrolled more efficiently by our lovely boys in blue? More than 20 officers can be dispatched to a bar on Southeast Belmont to question a rapper, but there are never any around when kids get shot. Sounds like gang violence is merely a symptom of a much bigger problem.

Don't get me wrong, I do believe gang violence is a huge concern. Those are my kids in danger. My son was at the Boys and Girl's Club on North Trenton a couple of weeks ago when a man was shot in New Columbia. My concerns are very real. They go beyond trying to make the city a reflection of cable TV shows.

On your website, you say you want to develop a "comprehensive resource for young, [B]lack males in Portland to realize their fullest potential." While I find that very admirable, I also find it rather amusing. It's funny that the word "gang" is often synonymous with the word "Black." Gang issues are automatically Black issues and Black issues are automatically gang issues. But I'd like to open up your statement to all lower-class young males; Black, brown and white because I know it's not just Black men who get involved in gangs.

The other thing that I find funny about this statement is that while you want them to realize their potential, the city has made every attempt to stifle them. The schools these kids attend are not properly funded and never have been. I am a graduate of Jefferson High School and I know the "no funds for school" blues all too well. We had crappy teachers, insufficient materials and little to no programs that would lead

us anywhere other than a basketball court. Our children are undereducated and underexposed to opportunities. How on earth can they even know what their potential is half the time?

There are many who do see potential or develop a passion for something like music, perhaps. Hip-hop artists like Glenn Waco and Mic Capes were able to turn to music instead of gangs. They were able to come out of North Portland without getting involved, but it's not a road many want to travel because the chances of succeeding are slim. Why? Because the city has done everything in its power to hinder the growth of hip-hop artists in Portland.

What kid wants to become a hip-hop artist when shows get shutdown? How can you expect a young man to take the risk of working towards a passion that will be limited by city leaders? You want them to thrive? Forgive me for calling bullsh\*\*.

If you really see gang violence as a concern, you will put more time,

effort, and resources into bettering the community. Asking people to identify a shooter won't stop anything. We need to stop creating them. These people are products of their environments and I hate to say it Mr. Mayor, but you control those environments. If these kids grow up to kill a man in the park or shoot a kid on the street that means you're doing something wrong.

Sir, to be frank, I'm tired of the lip service. All this talk of things being an issue, all the lists of ideas you have to make it better, they're not getting us anywhere. The violence this year is already worse than it was last year. Spare me with the promises and fake smiles. If you want the gang violence to get better, simply make it better. Support the education of these kids, provide opportunities to cultivate their passions, and ensure our police are actually protecting and serving instead of running the streets as Portland's most notorious gang.

Sharde Nabors is a Portland writer and blogger. Her website is [shardesaidwhat.com](http://shardesaidwhat.com).

## Racial Progress and Unfinished Business

### After the Civil Rights Act of 1964

BY MARC H. MORIAL

This month marked the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed discrimination and segregation based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

First introduced by President John F. Kennedy shortly before his 1963 assassination, the Civil Rights Act also offered greater protections for the right to vote and paved the way for another historic achievement one year later – the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Momentum for the legislation picked up following the 1963 March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the National Urban League's Whitney M. Young, along with 250,000 activists and citizens, gathered to demand "Jobs and Freedom" for people of all races who were locked out, left out, and disenfranchised.

President Kennedy, a Massachusetts liberal, introduced the bill in June of 1963, just five months be-



fore his assassination. It was up to his appointed successor, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, a former U.S. Senator from Texas with deep southern roots, to carry it over the finish line. Despite extreme opposition, especially from his former southern Congressional allies, President Johnson successfully navigated the bill's passage. He signed it into law on July 2, 1964, surrounded by Dr. King, Whitney

*The National Urban League believes there is no better and fitting tribute to the men and women who 50 years ago fought for and died to secure a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act than to pass the VRAA this year before the November mid-term elections.*

Young and a multi-racial group of civil rights activists.

It was only 50 years ago that it was legal in some states to deny blacks the right to eat in the same restaurants as whites, to sit in the same movie theaters or even to apply for the same jobs. Thankfully, that is no longer true anywhere in America. We have also seen other gains, including a rising black middle class and an increase in African American high school graduation

rates. However, there is still a wide opportunity gap in America.

According to a recent USA Today article, "In almost every economic category, blacks have been gaining, but not by enough. Median family income (in inflation-adjusted dollars) is up from \$22,000 in 1963 to more than \$40,000 today, still just two-thirds of the median for all Americans. Black unemployment remains twice the level of white

unemployment, similar to where it was in 1972. The black poverty rate has dropped from more than 40% in the 1960s to about 27% today; child poverty similarly has dipped from 67% to about 40%. Those numbers still are glaring, however. And the gap in overall wealth is more than 5-to-1 between whites and blacks..."

Perhaps the most visible demonstration of the progress we have made over the past 50 years is the 2008 election and the 2012 reelec-

tion of Barack Obama as America's first Black President. But even that achievement has been met with a backlash, as right wing voter suppression efforts have risen since President Obama first took office and the U. S. Supreme Court essentially gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 last year.

Obviously, 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, our work is not yet done. As we noted last month in our statement in support of the Voting Rights Amendment Act now before Congress, "The National Urban League be-

lieves there is no better and fitting tribute to the men and women who 50 years ago fought for and died to secure a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act than to pass the VRAA this year before the November mid-term elections.

We cannot focus only on a celebration of progress. We must also ensure there is a continuation of the very equality and opportunity that are at the core of this country's democratic values.

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