

OPINION

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Guns Lethalize Anger and Despair

Common sense actions are the right direction

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Every single year, more than 30,000 Americans have their lives cut short by guns —30,000. Suicides. Domestic violence. Gang shootouts. Accidents.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost brothers and sisters, or buried their own children. Many have had to learn to live with a disability, or learned to live without the love of their life.

President Obama spoke movingly about the lives shattered by America's gun violence epidemic on Jan. 5 as he announced a series of new executive actions to reduce gun violence. These new measures will not prevent every shooting that snuffs out the lives of nearly seven children to gun violence daily; they will save many lives and help staunch the

relentless plague of gun violence that terrorizes our nation's homes, schools and communities.

The president's executive actions clarify that for purposes of requiring background checks a person does not need to sell guns in a traditional storefront to be "engaged in the business" of selling guns. Some of those who conduct sales over the Internet or at gun shows will now be required to obtain a license and run background checks on potential purchasers or face stiff penalties. These steps, coupled with greater efficiency and effectiveness in our background check system, enforcement of existing gun laws, and new investments in mental health treatment and research into gun safety technologies, are long overdue.

Legislative action to strengthen huge weaknesses in our nation's gun laws is still required but the president's common-sense execu-

tive actions move us in the right direction.

Several measures highlight one of the key components of our gun violence crisis: that much gun violence begins at home. So many wrongly believe that gun violence happens mostly "out on the streets" and others believe owning a gun will protect their family from gun violence. The opposite is true: A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide, and accidental death.

Guns lethalyze anger, domestic disputes, mental illness and despair. A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher, suicide three to five times higher, and accidental death four times higher. The pro-gun lobby has created the fantasy of a gun as a homeowner's perfect protection against a mythical intruder. In reality, each time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are four

unintentional shooting deaths or injuries, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and 11 completed or attempted gun suicides.

Suicides are the leading cause of gun deaths in America. In 2014, 21,334 adults, children and teens committed suicide with a gun compared to 10,945 gun homicides. Whites are most likely to die by gun suicide followed by American Indians and Alaska Natives. Whites were more than three times as likely as blacks and nearly five times as likely as Hispanics to commit suicide by guns. In 2014, 929 children and teens committed suicide with a gun and 1,455 children and teens died in gun homicides.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence notes the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide 500 percent. Even when it is not used to kill, a gun wielded by a domestic abuser increases the frequency of ongo-

ing, nonfatal domestic abuse by increasing the abuser's ability to control a victim; the ever-present threat of gun violence makes it more difficult for victims to leave their abusers.

The FBI defines a "mass murder" as an event in which four or more people are killed. By that definition the majority of "mass shootings" are cases of domestic violence and the majority of mass shooting victims are women and children.

We can do better. We must do better. President Obama said: "We know we can't stop every act of violence, every act of evil in the world. But maybe we could try to stop one . . ." He echoes Nobel Literature Laureate Albert Camus' words in 1948: "Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children."

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.



Why the President Should Visit Haiti

An addition for Obama's bucket list

BY DR. RON DANIELS

Recently much attention has been made of President Obama's "bucket list," those things he would like to accomplish before the end of his term. Among the items on his list is a visit to Cuba. This would be a dramatic event, climaxing one of the signature achievements of his presidency - breaking the decades-long diplomatic and economic isolation of Cuba to usher in a new era of normalized relations. The site of an American President, the first African American President, being welcomed in Cuba, an Afro-Hispanic nation, would be stunning and historic!



But, I also believe a visit to Haiti, the world's first Black Republic should be on Obama's bucket list. The Haiti Support Project of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century always views January as Haitian Independence Month because it was on Jan. 1, 1804 that General Jean Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti's independence. This after a long, brutal but glorious struggle for self-determination during which the Haitian freedom fighters defeated the British, Spanish and ultimately decimated the army of Napoleon Bonaparte of France!

Never in the history of humankind had an enslaved people defeated their slave

masters to create an independent nation. The Haitian Revolution, which gave birth to the world's first Black Republic, was one of the greatest feats in history! Not only did the Haitian freedom fighters create an independent nation at the height of the European and American slave trade, they further declared that any enslaved person who set foot on Haitian soil would be free!

These declarations alone are of sufficient historical significance to warrant acknowl-

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edgement with a visit by President Obama. This recognition would be particularly significant since Haiti was stigmatized, marginalized and punished by the U.S. and other slave trading nations for fear that the example of an independent black nation would be infectious, spreading among enslaved Africans everywhere to fuel rebellions. This was indeed what happened.

It is important to state that President Obama should also visit the first black republic because the U.S. owes a huge debt of gratitude to Haiti for its contributions to this nation's struggle for independence and the expansion of its territory.

Under the leadership of General Henri Christophe and at the behest of the French, Haitian troops contributed to the defeat of the British in the battle of Savannah during the Revolutionary War. The colonies achieved their independence and were able to found a new nation on what was Native American land, because the Louisiana Purchase was a direct outgrowth of the defeat of Napoleon's armies by the Haitian Freedom Fighters. This disastrous defeat end-

ed Napoleon's grand vision of creating an economic axis between Saint Dominique (Haiti), the most prosperous "colony" in the Caribbean and the vast French territory in North America, anchored by the city of New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi River. After the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Haitians, Napoleon abandoned this ambitious goal and sold the Louisiana Territory to the U.S. at a bargain basement price. The size of the U.S. nearly doubled as a result of this acquisition, a fact that Americans should forever be thankful to the Haitians for facilitating.

When the U.S. invaded Haiti in 1915,

it was the NAACP under the leadership of Walter White that led the opposition to the U.S. occupation. The reality of an independent black nation in the Caribbean undercut the argument of black inferiority as a rationale for legal and de facto segregation in the U.S. Haiti was a beacon of hope to African people everywhere!

Needless to say, support for the ruthless Duvalier regimes and constant destabilizing interventions and interference in Haiti, the U.S. has seldom afforded the first black republic the dignity, respect and support its historical significance and contribution to this nation deserve. A state visit by President Barack Obama would be an occasion to acknowledge these historical wrongs and properly recognize Haiti's contribution to the U.S. and the World! It might also usher in a new era of respectful and mutually beneficial relations with Haiti; a nation with 10 million people (with a vibrant and productive Diaspora in the U.S.) which has the potential to become an economic powerhouse in the region.

So, President Obama, add a visit to Haiti to your "bucket list," and while you're there add a tour of the magnificent Citadel, one of the greatest monuments to freedom and self-determination in the world, to the itinerary. Let the planning begin for a glorious experience in the world's first black republic!

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