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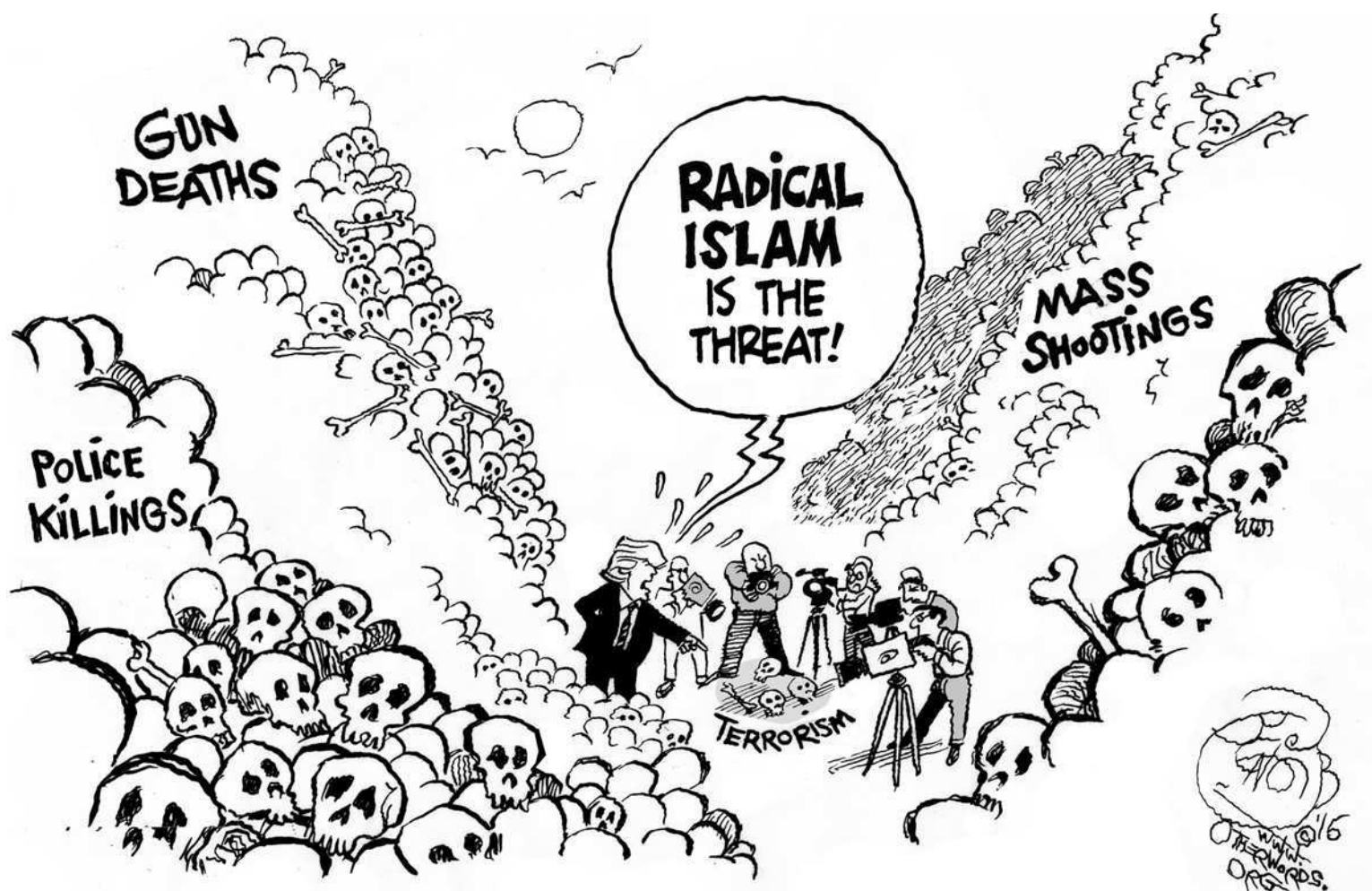
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OPINION



Voting is Vital, so is Protest and Dissent

Kaepernick, Rapinoe and the election

BY LEW CHURCH

As GOP nominee Donald Trump makes inroads towards occupying the Oval Office in this fall's campaign, those of us who support Hillary and other women candidates for office believe it is vital to turn out to vote in November, but to also mobilize support for dissenters like Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe who think our country is headed in the wrong direction.

As Ron Daniels correctly asserts (Portland Observer, Sept. 21 issue) dissent is central in our democracy to fight for civil rights and for social justice.

A few years ago, as a senior in high school in a conservative southern California town, I chose to "read the announcements" at the beginning of our home room class. Instead, I gave an impromptu speech protesting our home room teacher's personal critique of students at our school for not turning out sufficiently for the Marine Corps band, for not being sufficiently patriotic, and not supporting the Vietnam War.

Many of us felt that this was that teacher's First Amendment right (even in our classroom at a public school) but that we also had the right to use the First Amendment.

In response to my five minute, anti-war protest speech, our teacher sent me to the school counseling office. That councilor, a bit more liberal than our teacher, agreed the Vietnam War needed to be stopped and suggested it was our teacher who needed some counseling.

Today, Kaepernick has been getting death threats for his protesting the National Anthem at sports games and for his support of Black Lives Matter. Many of us from Portland State University were happy to occupy Portland City Hall last month and shout "Black Lives Matter" outside the office of mayor Charlie Hales.

Since Kaepernick began his protest, other sports figures have joined the campaign, including former University of Portland women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe, now playing for Seattle. Rapinoe stated that, as an out lesbian and white person, she felt it important to sit with him or take a knee during the anthem in support of Black Lives Matter.

Some older white gentlemen who are low-income tenants that we have been doing outreach to at PSU (and who both support Donald Trump for president in November) have said that they oppose Black Lives Matter -- that "all lives matter." But language is a way to fight oppression, including the murder by police of unarmed African-Americans in cities around the country (and Mr. Zimmerman of Trayvon Martin).

Taking a knee or sitting during the anthem is a form of speech, protected by the First Amendment. Donald Trump's response to Kaepernick's protest, of course, was to say he might "be more comfortable in a different country that is more to his liking."

This is a classic and racist dodge. But oppression, as Rapinoe pointed out, targets many people. Trump himself in fact has been castigating journalists, Mexicans, judges, black folks, immigrants, Muslims, Hillary, and a host of other people.

At Portland State, we were saddened at the same time to see that the pro-gun, pro-NRA lobby burned in effigy our Democratic governor Kate Brown (who is openly bisexual) because of her excellent support of better gun safety laws. Women, like other minorities, are often targeted by racist individuals; those Hillary calls "the despicable."

Here in Portland, a progressive, activist woman and small business owner, Chloe Eudaly, is now in a November runoff in the election against incumbent Steve Novick for a seat on the Portland City Council. So far, the opposition to Eudaly's insurgent, grassroots campaign has been polite, but is still showing signs of "the old boys' network."

While former mayor Tom Potter has endorsed Eudaly's campaign, which focuses on affordable housing for all and rent control now,

many current (white, male) politicians have endorsed Novick's reelection bid. The three Anglo gentlemen also on City Council (Charlie Hales, Dan Saltzman and Nick Fish) have all endorsed Novick. Notably, Amanda Fritz, the only woman on city council, has yet to endorse either candidate. If Eudaly wins that seat, she will be the second woman on our City Council and only the 8th woman in 150 years to be elected to the office.

Ben Franklin once said the U.S. is "a democracy, if you can keep it." At the national level, while it may be easy for some to vote for Trump, or cast votes that help Trump (the Greens, the Libertarians) or to not vote at all -- in our PSU activist coalition, we believe that Hillary is the one candidate this election who will represent human rights and social justice, at home and abroad. Trump, he has made clear, will represent Trump.

Voting is vital, but as Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe are representing, so is dissent, protesting and organizing against inroads by those who seek to control, to exploit, to marginalize and to demonize most of the people who live on our small planet.

Lew Church is coordinator of the PSU Progressive Student Union and founding publisher/editor of the PSU Rearguard and PSU Agitator, activist papers on the left.