

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

When Soldiers Die in Wars We Don't Know About

What on earth are we doing in Niger?

BY PETER CERTO,

In our military-revering culture, it's a strange thing for a president to start a war of words with the grieving families of slain soldiers.

Strange, yes. But from Donald Trump's campaign season feud with the parents of Humayun Khan, who died protecting fellow soldiers in Iraq, to his recent feud with the mourning widow of La David Johnson, who died on patrol in Niger, it's no longer surprising.

At root in the latest spat is a comment Trump made to La David's widow Myeshia Johnson:



"He knew what he signed up for." Myeshia thought that remark was disrespectful — she later said it "made me cry."

Beyond insensitive, though, there's a good chance it simply wasn't true.

Why, after all, should La David have expected to die in a dusty corner of Niger — a Saharan country most Americans (and, one suspects, their president) couldn't find on a map? And where the U.S. isn't actually at war?

If you were surprised to learn the U.S. has nearly a thousand troops in Niger, you're not alone. Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican who serves on the Armed Forces Committee, told NBC he "had no idea." Neither did Chuck Schumer, the Senate's top Democrat.

Well, the surprises may keep coming.

The New York Times notes that the U.S. now has "over 240,000 active-duty and reserve troops in at least 172 countries and territories." Count it again: 172 countries, out of 193 UN member states.

Most of us remain at least dimly aware that we still have thousands of troops in war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in Cold War outposts like Japan, South Korea, and Germany. But what about the 160-plus others? And where are the nearly 38,000 troops whose location the Pentagon lists as "unknown"?

We catch an occasional glimpse of this global footprint when a U.S. service member dies someplace surprising — as Ryan Owens did earlier this year in Yemen, and a Navy SEAL did several months later in Somalia. More

rarely we catch darker reminders still, when our wars abroad come home in the form of terrorist attacks. But mostly the American people remain every bit as in the dark as Graham and Schumer.

Americans like to imagine ourselves as citizens of a democracy that rejects the colonial ambitions of Old World powers like France and the UK. And yet we've deployed troops to literally most of the planet, and our leading lawmakers — tasked by the Constitution with the exclusive right to declare war — don't even know about it.

Worse still, Congress appears to be abetting its own irrelevance.

Earlier this year, House Speaker Paul Ryan quietly killed an amendment by Democrat Barbara Lee that would've revoked Congress' post-9/11 Authorization of Military Force, which has been used as a fig leaf of legality for

this global war making. And last month the Senate voted 2:1 to reject an amendment from Republican Rand Paul that would've done the same.

Odds are, the real victims from our post-9/11 wars live in countries we seldom see or hear about. But as veteran and Army strategist Danny Sjursen writes, "the potential, and all too pervasive, deaths of American service members demand a public hearing" too. Especially when 16-plus years of war doesn't appear to have made the world any safer.

When our soldiers kill and die in fruitless wars we don't know about and can't end, we're not a democracy anymore — we're an empire. And perhaps a fading one at that.

Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies and the editor of OtherWords.org.

A Digital Revolution Powered by Black Millennials

A megaphone for justice, awareness and change

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The presence and influence of black millennials on our shared digital frontier can neither be denied nor dismissed. From viral memes that catch celebrities at their best—and worst, to trending hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite with the power to spark social awareness and compel offline action, black millennials are digital pioneers. They have eagerly and creatively adopted the medium, using its emerging technologies as a megaphone for justice, raising awareness and effecting change.

Statistically, black families continue to remain less likely than white families to have dedicated Internet access at home and are more likely to access the internet from their mobile phones.

According to the latest Nielsen reporting on the online presence and participation of black millennials, "Young, Connected and Black: African-American Millennials Are Driving Social Change and Leading Digital Ad-



vancement," 91 percent of African Americans report owning a smartphone—this comes only second to Asian Americans who report 94 percent smartphone ownership—and 91 percent of African Americans also report that they access the Internet through mobile devices.

Tech-savvy African Americans, particularly the more than 11 million identified as black millennials are influential, leading users of mobile technology and platforms, and voracious consumers and creators of digital content. They are also uniquely positioned to usher the movement for social justice into the digital age and have done so one hashtag, meme and social campaign at a time.

From Ferguson to the Oscars, we have witnessed the power of e-amplified activism and its ability to exert its influence and pressure to effect change beyond the world wide web. It is clear that civil rights, activism, and large-scale national conversations will exist more and more at the curve of technology. In comparison to previous generations, black millennials earn more, spend more and are experiencing increased educational advancements. We must ensure that this progress and the narrowing of our nation's digital divide continues unabated.

The National Urban League understands that our world is increasingly global and networked. We believe that being left out of the digital revolution, whether you are an activist fighting for equality or attempting to access employment opportunities, is a detriment to our communities and, ultimately, our nation.

Committed to economic empowerment, we have consistently called for the expansion of high-speed broadband to urban and rural America, including as recently as in our Main Street Marshall Plan. At this year's annual conference we convened a Hackathon, challenging participants to create apps that address racial and social justice. We also featured Tech Connect, a space

to explore the complex intersections between tech, race and social change.

We have not only committed to talking about the digital economy, and the digital space as a tool in the fight for social justice, but we actively prepare people for it. As black millennials forge ahead on the digital frontier, we acknowledge and celebrate their collective strength and power—and recognize the decidedly analog roots of their movement.

Despite attempts to restrict communication among enslaved Africans, these men and women used their ingenuity and creativity to communicate in the beat of a drum, the clap of roughened hands and the moans of spirituals. With these early tools they

were able to communicate sorrow, joy and revolution.

Today, the tools are different and more powerful, but the impulse to use what we have to raise awareness, evoke discussion and trigger action remains the same. To access the new digital economy and to take advantage of the power of technology to impact our lives, we must continue to ensure access and promote STEM education.

We applaud those leaders and young professionals in our communities who are rising to the occasion and using digital advances to bring online pressure to bear on our offline realities.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Got Loved Ones You Want to Visit?

Coffee Creek, Two Rivers, Snake River, OSP, Deer Ridge,
Mill Creek, Federal, OSCI, Eastern Oregon or other institutions?

We can Help. Carpool with us on the weekend.

Lunch Included. Space is Limited, RSVP required.

For More information . . .

Call or Text 503-447-6550