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OPINION

The Second Amendment and White Anxiety

America clearly has a gun problem

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

There has been yet another school shooting in America. The multiple murders at the Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. mark the 18th school shooting in this nation since the beginning of the year. And once again the only response by elected officials has been to offer “thoughts and prayers” for the victims and their families.

News anchors and pundits scratch their heads and ask, “What can be done to fix this?” while ignoring the obvious answer - limit access to guns.

If this seems like madness, it’s because it is. This country clearly has a gun problem, a problem that can be solved if we act, as so many countries around the world have done. But we choose not to.

Much of the blame for these killings is placed at the feet of the National Rifle Association, the political behemoth that slides dollars into the pockets of every conservative federal elected official and to many state politicians as well. These “bribes” ensure that conservative politicians will not enact any meaningful legislation that will stop or slow the flow of guns, even into the hands of the criminally insane. But the NRA could not exist without a culture in this country that places a higher

priority on the right to gun ownership than on the lives of school children.

The main question then becomes, “How did this madness come to dictate America’s priorities?”

In attempting to answer this question, we cannot ignore the racial dynamic of America’s obsession with guns. White men can walk the streets with fully loaded automatic rifles and suffer no negative consequences, while people of color are shot dead for having a toy gun.

This is because the freedom of Americans to bear arms that is not the real issue here; it is the freedom of white Americans to arm themselves against people of color (who are perceived as a threat).

Even though the great majority of mass shooters are white, the perceived threat is the armed person of color. The psyches of many white Americans are tainted by a fear of retribution for past wrongs and injustices committed against people of color. This fear will not go away anytime soon because for as long as the injustices persist, the fear will persist and the gun culture will persist.

So, the mass killings will persist.

Typically, and ironically, the victims of American injustice are not doing the killing. A segment of the white populace that is armed to the teeth unleashes its murderous anxiety by firing assault weapons,

killing the innocent. It may seem farfetched to quote a character from a “Star Wars” episode, but in this case, the warning by Master Jedi Yoda’s makes sense: “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

To those whites prone to such behavior, Donald Trump has given license to openly fear and hate people of color. The resulting suffering has followed, as night follows the day.

The problem of mass shootings is most definitely a gun problem. It is also undeniably a mental health problem. And at the base of it all, the root of the gun culture that allows the mentally ill to run around with the capability to commit multiple murders is white America’s fear of people of color.

But the fear that many white people have of people of color pales in comparison to their fear of a black man with a gun. The high-water mark for American gun control legislation during the last 80 years was in the late 1960s, due in large part to the Black Panther Party showing up heavily armed at the California State House in May 1967. The sight of armed black men with large afros and berets sent a chill down America’s spine and sparked political activity that eventually led to new gun control laws being passed in federal and state legislatures.

In the years since, law enforcement across the country struck heavy blows against black organizations perceived to be radical,

armed and dangerous. These organizations began to fade and the perceived threat level lessened. Once this happened, gun control began to be relaxed.

A working paper released by the Harvard Business School in 2016 explored the impact of mass shootings on gun policy from 1989 to 2014. It showed that gun laws have been loosened over the years by legislators courted by the gun lobby. The paper even states, “When there is a Republican-controlled legislature, mass shootings lead to more firearm laws that loosen gun control. A mass shooting in the previous year increases the number of enacted laws that loosen gun restrictions by 75 percent in states with Republican-controlled legislatures.”

In other words, when there is a mass shooting, Republicans make it easier for someone to commit another mass shooting by loosening gun control laws. This can best be explained by the existence of a great fear of, and a need to arm against, the perceived threat posed by people of color.

The gun lobby’s 2nd Amendment argument to keep and bear arms is predicated upon self-defense. But the language of that amendment begins, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State...” Gun rights advocates never talk about this first clause of the one sentence that is the 2nd Amendment. The necessary “well regulated Militia” underpinning the right to keep and bear arms has been swept aside, as

it is now alleged that the amendment addresses the security of individuals rather than that of the “free state.”

Today, it is white privilege, not America, that some white people are seeking to protected by the 2nd Amendment.

We must now ask ourselves, “How do we, as citizens, take on the gun lobby and the culture that supports it?” Clearly, our current, collective elected officials will do nothing.

We, as citizens, need to begin on the local, state and federal levels to replace politicians who are lackeys of the NRA and the gun lobby so that we can pass laws restricting access to automatic weapons. The right to bear arms does not mean the right to bear all weapons. Ordinary people cannot possess mortars, rocket launchers or grenades, so, why can’t we extend these prohibitions to include automatic assault rifles? Why can’t we mandate strict background checks and limit the number of guns an individual can purchase?

We must put people in office who have principles and who value human life over profit and privilege and find ways to pass laws that create more effective gun controls.

It is time for us to use gun laws to protect citizens rather than to secure white privilege.

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Been Waiting My Entire Life for a Black Superhero

The power of being represented

BY LAKAYANA DRURY

I remember sitting on the floor of Lakeview Library, six years old, pulling out the bins of superhero comics and staring at the covers of Hulk and Wolverine. I remember stuffing my backpack full of action figures as a kid on my way to school. Taking my Batman figure on adventures around my house.

I remember playing Power Rangers at recess at Lapham Elementary and wanting to be the Red Ranger because he was the lead-

er, he was cool and also white, and wanting to change my name to Tommy. I remember creating my own superhero comic in sixth grade, Morpho Man, who I drew as a white guy and it never

occurred to me that he could be black.

I had no understanding of race at the time. It never crossed my mind that all of my action figures in my backpack were white. I was and still am a dreamer. I acted out countless battles and adventures as a crime-fighting superhero as a kid on playgrounds across my city. Punching and kicking at villains that were so real to me as my imagination ran wild. And as big as my imagination was, never once in those childhood fantasies did I envision my alter ego was

black. And while I didn’t grow up to wear a cape or mask, I did become a real life superhero of sorts; a teacher.

All of those memories of comics and heroes played in my mind as I sat in the theater with all of my students for the new movie Black Panther. I organized a trip for my whole school because I wanted them to see a black superhero on the big screen.

Especially for my students of color, I wanted them to be part of their moment. White boys had their moment when Star Wars came out in 1977. White children had their moment when Harry Potter came out in 1999. For little black boys and girls, and adults who had once been little black boys and girls, finally this is our moment.

I wanted them to see powerful

black men and women fighting villains. Whose names were not Bruce or Peter or Jane. I wanted the idea of black superheroes to seep into their conscious so that the next time they drew a superhero it would occur to them that he or she could be black. Or maybe Asian or Muslim or transgender.

I wanted them to see black men that were scientists, women who were warriors and young people who were inventors. I wanted them to see an Africa that stood in its power. But I also wanted them to understand it was bigger than a film.

Before the movie, we discussed the context leading up to the production of Black Panther -- that there wouldn’t be a Lupita Nyong’o without Hattie McDaniel; that 100 years ago “Birth of a

Nation” was playing in the White House; that Denzel Washington won an Academy Award for “Training Day” and not Malcolm X; and how we went from Blaxploitation films in the 1970’s to Afrofuturism in 2018.

I was little me again in the theater as I watched T’Challa leap, run and fight across the screen. I was the little boy on the court in Oakland, star-struck as his ship flew overhead.

I have been waiting my entire life for a black superhero on the big screen and I didn’t even know it. I want my students to know it. I want them to feel it. To understand it. And then, like T’challa, I want them all to go out into the world claim their throne and be great. Wakanda Forever!

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