

OPINION

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Addressing Gun Violence in its Totality

Police kill more people than mass shooters

BY EBONY SLAUGHTER-JOHNSON

This spring, an estimated 800,000 Americans gathered in Washington, D.C. to participate in the “March for Our Lives” organized by the teenage survivors of the school massacre in Parkland, Fla. Thou-

sands more attended 800 sister marches across the nation and around the world for gun reform.

Gun control is often portrayed as a “white” issue, but the march was encouragingly intersectional. Organizers shared the stage with members of black and brown communities whose daily encounters with gun violence are rarely treated with the kind of media attention the Florida students have gotten.

A number of the Parkland students have been upfront about the privileges afforded to them by their race and socioeconomic status — and have used these privileges to create space for those from other communities. Alongside them were activists of color from Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. who testified to their personal experiences with

gun violence.

There was no doubt at the March for Our Lives that black lives matter. National events still show, however, the extent to which black life is devalued.

On April 4, Saheed Vassell was killed by law enforcement officers in Brooklyn. He was unarmed and suffering from mental illness. What the officers claimed they thought was a gun was shown to be a piece of a welding torch Vassell used for work.

On March 18, Stephon Clark, an unarmed black man, was killed by law enforcement officers in his grandparents’ backyard in Sacramento, Calif. He too was unarmed. Clark was shot at 20 times and hit eight times in the back.

Some 590 Americans were killed in mass shootings last year, according to MassShootingTracker.org which counts events in which four or more people are shot. But that figure almost pales in comparison to the number of Americans subjected to gun violence by law enforcement.

According to the Washington Post, law enforcement officers shot and killed 987 Americans in 2017 alone. Despite constituting 12 percent of the population, nearly a quarter of those shot were black Americans. Of those 223 black Americans, all but nine were

black men.

Because police don’t report this data themselves, counts can vary. MappingPoliceViolence.org, counting more than just shootings, determined that law enforcement officers killed 1,146 Americans in 2017. Similarly, one quarter of those were black.

suburbs, and city centers can be curbed with legislation that mandates universal background checks, a ban on bump stocks, a ban on assault weapons, and an increase in the age at which Americans are able to purchase guns.

But to those common demands I’d add: There should be more

faith — like the ones who killed Stephon Clark after muting theirs — cannot and should not be trusted with a weapon.

If the movement behind the March for Our Lives wants to address gun violence in its totality, it should keep reaching out to all affected communities. And it must



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Gun violence is devastating in all its forms and must be addressed at all levels of government. However, there’s something truly perverse about the frequency of the violence inflicted by law enforcement upon the communities they’re called to serve and protect.

Shootings in schools, wealthy

sensitivity training for law enforcement, community policing, and weapons training that reinforces that there are other ways to subdue a suspect than to kill them.

At the very least, all officers should be required to wear body cameras properly at all times. An officer that cannot be trusted to operate a body camera in good

not only speak to instances of mass gun violence, but also to gun violence inflicted by law enforcement every day across the country.

Ebony Slaughter-Johnson is an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies who covers history, race, and the criminalization of poverty. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

A Counterproductive Assault on Food Stamps

GOP pushes mean plan against poor

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Once again, Republicans are taking aim at poor people.

What is it this time? Adding a stricter work requirement to receive what used to be known as food stamps. (Today it’s known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, but that just doesn’t have the same ring to it.)

If the Republican House bill goes through, anyone between the ages of 18 and 59 will have to work or participate in a work training program for 20 hours

a week in order to receive food stamp benefits.

Frankly, this is both disgusting and counterproductive. Let me explain why.

First of all, among other things, food stamps are an incredible economic stimulus. For every \$1 spent on food stamps, the economy gets a \$1.79 boost. Every \$1 billion spent on food stamps results in creating an additional 8,900 to 17,900 full time jobs.

In other words, cutting food stamps cuts jobs.

Making it harder to get food stamps will, in effect, cut food stamps — and therefore cut jobs.

How so? Well, most people on food stamps who can work already do.

About two out of five food stamp recipients live in house-

holds where someone works. They’re the working poor. They work, but don’t make enough money to make ends meet.

What about the rest, who have no income? One in five are disabled, and one quarter are elderly. For many Americans, there’s a moral obligation to feed the hungry. Period, end of story, no more information needed. If somebody is hungry, feed them. The fact that feeding them creates jobs is just a bonus.

Let’s say you’re a skeptic, though. Who are these lazy people who just won’t work? And why can’t they work?

Turns out we’ve been here before, when we began requiring welfare recipients to have jobs or participate in training programs back in the 1990s. And, lucky for us, sociologists Jane Collins and Victoria Mayer researched the people affected by it and wrote

a book about them called *Both Hands Tied*.

Note that the title is *Both Hands Tied* and not *Lazy People Who Should Get Off Their Duffs and Work*.

They found that most of the people on welfare had worked for most of their lives. In almost every single case, they went on welfare because a family member needed care and they had to stay home to do it, or they themselves were ill.

One woman had a severely disabled child that no day care would agree to accept. She had to stay home to care for her child, and therefore wasn’t able to work.

Is that the person you want to deny food stamps? The mother caring for her disabled child?

The job training programs provided weren’t helpful either. They didn’t teach useful skills, and they didn’t lead to people finding long-

term work.

I don’t know who’s on food stamps and not working. But since food stamps pay only for food and not for any other needs, odds are everyone who can work already does. It’s not possible to get by otherwise.

I’ve been on food stamps. Trust me, you aren’t living the good life when you have to get them. On the contrary, you must be so poor to even qualify that you’ll do just about anything to work for more income.

Adding a work requirement to food stamps is a mean-spirited and short-sighted move that will harm our economy while exacerbating hunger.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of [Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It](http://RecipeforAmerica.com).

