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OPINION



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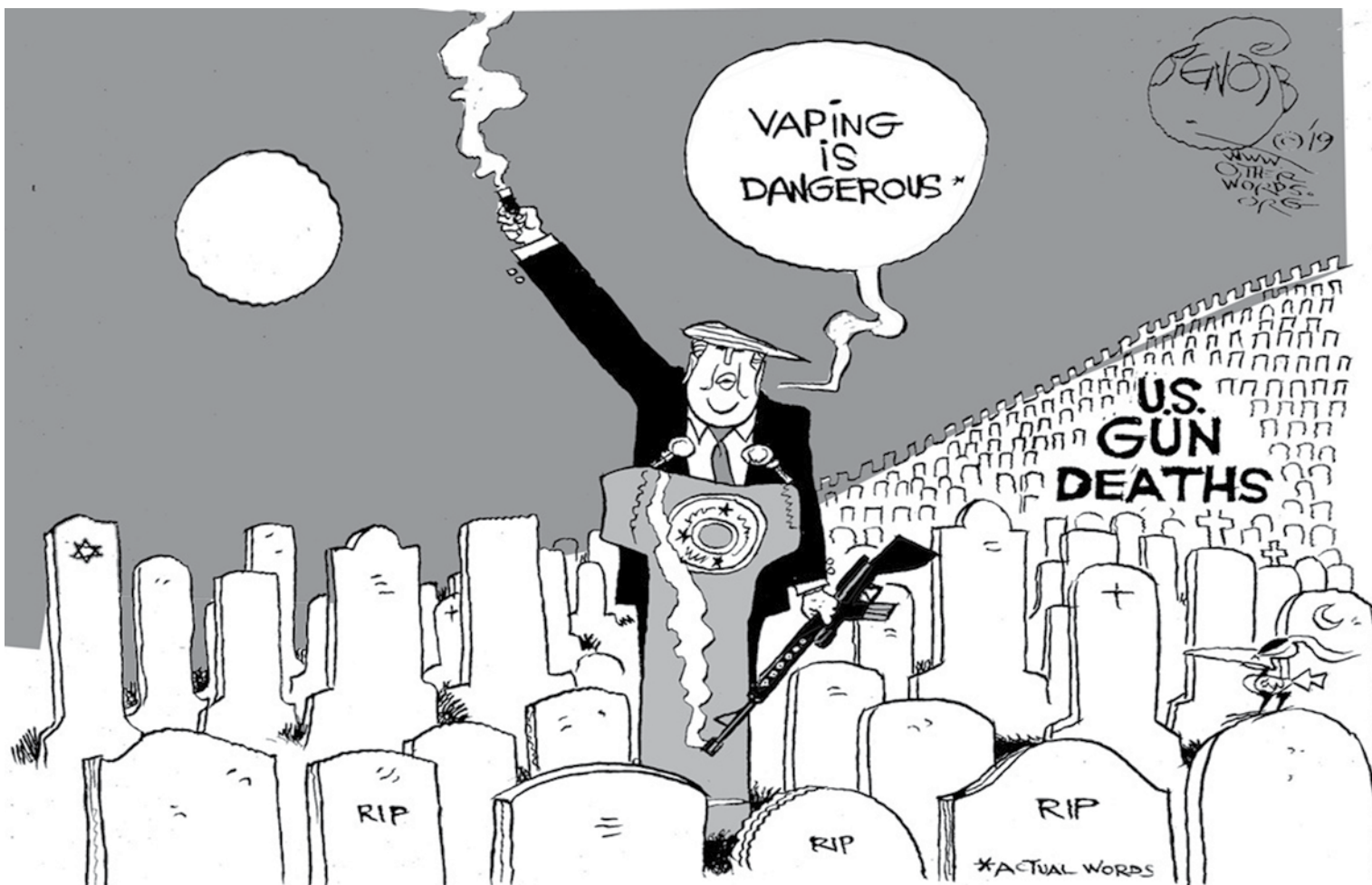
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Feeling Pressure to Talk about Structural Racism

A turning point on inequity

BY DIALLO BROOKS

At this September's Democratic presidential debate — held at a historically black college in Houston — some 14 million Americans tuned in to watch the 10 leading candidates debate each other for the first time.

The debate set another important precedent: All of the candidates spoke out against the systemic racism that has toxified the country and endangered our communities for centuries.

Some candidates promised to fight racial inequity with policies that would close the racial wealth gap or reduce maternal mortality disparities between white Americans and communities of color. Others stressed the need for gun control after the racist attack in El Paso.

And, vitally, all promised to address the deep racial inequities in our criminal justice system.

These conversations are encouraging. It's been 400 years since the first enslaved Africans were brought to the U.S. And after four centuries, it's well past time for our country's political leaders to embrace proactive policies to create lasting change.

From fugitive slave laws to Jim Crow to stop and frisk, the U.S.

criminal justice system especially has targeted, and too often unjustly punished, black Americans. Through practices like racial profiling and excessive force, today's criminal justice system upholds centuries-old patterns of racial surveillance and targeting.

I'm reminded every time I leave my house how I'm seen by others — and the threat

dren for the injustice and racism they will face in this world. Many black families already know how emotionally draining it is to have “the talk” on how to engage with police to stay safe.

If you're white, you might not have had to have the same conversation with your loved ones or the children in your life. But it's time for all of us now to step up and talk to each other.

I'm heartened that presidential

neighbors, colleagues, and friends about issues like racial profiling. All of us, regardless of the color of our skin, should continue to push America to strive to live the values of justice and equity that we process — and put hate and discrimination behind us for good.

We must recognize the enemy as more than a racist president who weaponizes bigotry and division, and as more than the criminal justice officials who dispro-

White Americans, in particular, can demonstrate their commitment to racial justice by talking to neighbors, colleagues, and friends about issues like racial profiling.

they may perceive as I go about my everyday routine.

In recent months black men have had the cops called on them while looking for a parking spot or depositing a paycheck. These ever-present headlines remind me, and those who look like me, of the burden of being a black man in America.

As a parent, it's not lost on me that one of my most important jobs is to prepare my three chil-

candidates are proposing bold policies to address the injustice African Americans in the U.S. continue to endure, but we all share the responsibility to talk about racial inequity. As the president and other political leaders stoke hate and fear to normalize racism, we all must be intentional about creating change.

White Americans, in particular, can demonstrate their commitment to racial justice by talking to

portionately profile communities of color. The enemy is the racism and oppression that's at the heart of our institutions and the normalization of that bigotry in our communities.

And we must fight, together, to dismantle these — and every — system of oppression.

Diallo Brooks is senior director of outreach and public engagement for People for the American Way.

