

OPINION

More Truths About Guns in America

Common sense gun safety laws work

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

On Nov. 6, 17-year-old Da'Qwan Jones-Morris, a former Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools scholar from St. Paul, Minn., was killed when he was accidentally shot in the chest by a 15-year-old friend playing with a stolen gun in our gun saturated nation.

Da'Qwan and a group of friends were playing video games after school when the boy who had stolen the gun a few days earlier pulled it out of his bag to show it to the 15-year-old, who fired it without realizing it was loaded. Da'Qwan, a high school senior, was the co-captain of his football team and excited about applying to college. His mother said she always sought out positive opportunities like the CDF Freedom Schools program, sports, and the church choir to keep her son busy—but she still couldn't keep him safe.

When will parents be able to protect their children from guns? CDF's [Protect Children Not Guns 2019](#) report sets the record straight about critical truths you need to know about gun regulations, gun laws, and the gun industry in America to fight the scourge of gun violence in our nation that takes 3,410 child lives a year—one every 2 hours and 34 minutes.

It is outrageous and irresponsible that the only unregulated consumer product in America is one that takes the lives of nine children and teens a day and injures another 50.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission can regulate teddy bears and toy



guns but not real guns. A 1976 amendment to the Consumer Product Safety Act specifically states that the Commission "shall make no ruling or order that restricts the manufacture or sale of guns, guns ammunition, or components of guns ammunition, including black powder or gunpowder for guns." This disgraceful restriction remains in effect today.

The gun industry has been granted broad immunity from liability lawsuits, preventing consumers from holding negligent gun manufacturers and dealers accountable for irresponsible be-

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havior unlike every other major industry. The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act —passed by Congress in 2005 with pressure from the NRA—grants gun manufacturers and dealers broad immunity from federal and state liability lawsuits. No other industry enjoys such blanket immunity. Given these special protections, gun manufacturers and dealers face virtually no penalties for failing to make guns safer or preventing their guns from getting into the wrong hands.

Virtually anyone can buy a gun without a background check under current law. Federal law requires anyone purchasing a gun from a federally licensed dealer to complete a background check but does

not cover private sales at gun shows, sales over the internet, and between individuals. These hugely dangerous loopholes allow people unable to pass a background check—including those convicted of violent crimes and domestic abuse—to easily obtain a gun.

But common sense gun safety laws work and have effectively reduced gun violence without preventing law abiding citizens from owning guns.

A study with data from 54 U.S. cities found diverting guns to criminals is much less common in states that license retail gun sellers; require careful record keeping that

Firearm prohibitions for high-risk groups reduce the risk of violent crime. A California study suggests denying handgun purchases to people who have committed violent misdemeanors is associated with a decreased risk of arrest for new gun and/or violent crimes.

Child access prevention laws save lives. Studies of child access prevention laws requiring gun owners to store guns so children and teens can't access them unsupervised have found they reduce accidental child shootings as much as 23 percent and adolescent suicides 8 percent.

Well-designed assault weapons bans reduce homicides, suicides and mass shootings. An Australian law banning and buying back assault weapons—including semi-automatic rifles, pump-action rifles and shotguns—was associated with lower homicide and suicide rates. No mass shootings occurred in the decade following the law's enactment compared with 11 in the decade before.

The majority of American voters, including gun owners, support common sense gun safety regulations. As of August 2019, 60 percent of voters supported stricter gun laws and 93 percent of voters and gun owners supported universal background checks. Three in five voters (60 percent) favored a nationwide ban on assault weapon sales and about 3 in 4 American voters (72 percent) said Congress must do more to reduce gun violence.

The American people want change. Our children are crying for it. Please make sure your lawmakers know and act on the truth about guns.

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund.

America's Racial Wealth Divide is Shocking

Inequality holding down entire country

BY DEDRICK ASANTE-MUHAMMAD

Americans are more aware than ever that America has a race problem — and, more specifically, a racial wealth divide problem. As researchers from the Institute for Policy Studies and I found earlier this year, median white families are 41 times wealthier than median black families in the United States.

As our country becomes more diverse, this shocking racial wealth divide is no longer a challenge for disenfranchised minorities alone. It's a threat to the entire American middle class.



Let me show you how.

Since the early 1980s, median wealth among black and Latino families has been stuck at less than \$10,000, while median white wealth has grown to \$140,000. Yet in spite of this growing white wealth, this huge divide means that national median wealth has actually declined.

The racial wealth divide, in short, is weakening our country as a whole.

Contributing to this divide is ongoing racial inequality in the two largest assets in most Americans' portfolios: business ownership and homeownership.

For the last 40 years, black and Latino homeownership rates have stayed below 50 percent, while white homeownership has remained steady at about 70 percent.

And although 13 percent of the U.S. population is black, only 2 percent of U.S. businesses employing more than one person are black-owned. Hispanics are 17 percent of the population but own just 6 percent of these businesses.

How do we fix this? By making smart investments.

The white middle class was built by major investments promoting education and homeownership, among other things, after World War II. But African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans were almost entirely left out of these programs. Now these groups deserve significant investments of their own.

What could that mean, exactly? This year, my colleagues and I presented several options in another report called Ten Solutions to Bridge the Racial Wealth Divide.

One of our ideas is to create Baby Bonds — that is, government-seeded investment accounts — for every child born in this country. Sen. Cory Booker offered a similar proposal in a 2018 bill called the American Opportunity Accounts Act.

We also call for significant investments in affordable housing and homeownership. Sen. Elizabeth Warren's American Housing and Economic Mobility Act and Sen. Bernie Sander's "Housing for All" plan would both be a good start.

We also believe that Congress should finally establish a commission to study reparations, and that all government agencies should improve their data collection on race and wealth.

For another thing, we could start enforcing laws already on the books.

My organization, the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, advocates requiring the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau to collect and disclose better data on loans made to minority, women-owned, and small businesses. Under the Dodd-Frank Act, it's already supposed to do that.

For centuries, America has turned its back on struggling families of color. This year, it's time we turned our back on the racial wealth divide. We need stronger data, better monitoring, and bold policy proposals across the board.

The data is right there: By bridging the racial wealth divide, we can reduce the economic inequality that's holding down our entire country.

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