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# OPINION

## Letter to the Editor

### Our Gun Violence Crisis

Forbes magazine ran a recent op-ed “Portland is dying” that grabbed the attention of city leaders. What doesn’t seem to garner the same kind of immediate response is the gun violence that is killing Black people in Portland.

According to Portland Police statistics, over the past 11 years in the city, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color under the age of 40 made up 45% to as high as 70% of the homicides where a person was shot and killed.

New police data also shows just how disproportionately the violence affects the Black community. Of the 191 people shot last year in Portland, 57% were Black compared to 28% who were white. In addition, almost half of the 41 people killed by gunfire in 2020 were Black.

I remember many of the gun violence victims in our city over the past 10 years. Billy Moore, a 16-year-old Black child shot while getting off the bus after saying goodbye to his dying mother in the hospital, for example; and Shiloh Hampton, a 14-year-old Black child gunned down while leaving the Lloyd Center mall and walking through Holladay Park; and Dhulfiqar Kareem Mseer, a 23-year-old refugee from Iraq and a Uber driver who was shot and killed as he stopped to pick up a passenger; and Kelley Marie Smith, 53, a Black woman who was shot and killed while delivering Uber eats.

We have a public health crisis in our city. Gun violence is disproportionately impacting, wounding and killing Black Portlanders and other Portlanders of Color, and so far, the Portland City Council doesn’t seem to care or have a plan to fix the problem.

Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, when asked recently if she believes Portland has a gang problem, said “no” and laughed when recounting how people in Portland would tell her to stay out of North and Northeast Portland because of gang violence. Commissioner Hardesty is wrong. Portland does have a gang problem. Her false narrative is dangerous to creating the funding and resources to address the issue of gun violence that overwhelming impacts young Black men. More importantly her words ignore the pain of the victims and families impacted.

Hardesty also recently stated in a KATU interview “They need to stop the supply of guns into the city of Portland.” Who is they? the Police? The gun violence reduction team? Disbanding the Portland Police Gun Violence Reduction Team was a poorly thought out, and was even worse in how Portland City Council went about it. We are witnessing the void it left to address gun violence in our city.

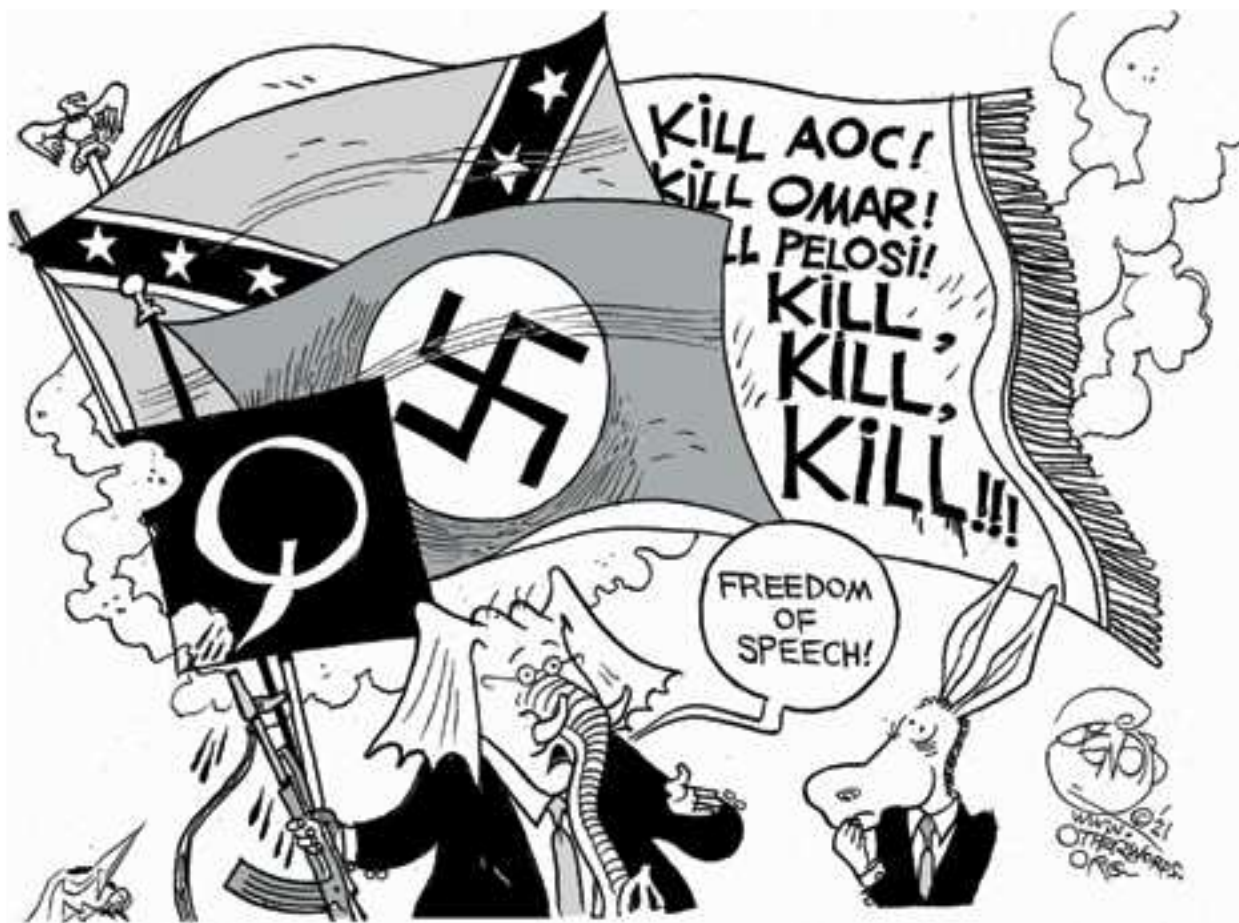
So far, the only Portland official with a plan to address the gun violence is PPB Chief Chuck Lovell who has responded to the concerns made clear from a city audit and data from police stops.

We as a community need to support every Black, Indigenous, Latino, Polynesian, and any Portlander or person of color who is seeking racial justice, including those that are being shot and killed in our streets, but we also need to support our police chief who as a Black man has a vested interest in ending these killings.

We need a plan, an accounting of the \$15 million in upstream services, and the funding for The Office of Violence Prevention. The solution must include more Portland police officers on the streets, improving trust, building relationships, and responding to gun violence in the community or more BIPOC Portlanders will die.

We can work to prioritize racial justice for all Portlanders and make the BIPOC community feel safe from gun violence and trust the police.

**Sam Sachs, Portland founder of No Hate Zone**



## Black Women Seldom Get Support We Deserve Black History Month time to celebrate accomplishments

BY SIRIUS BONNER

February is Black History Month — a time to celebrate the brilliance, beauty and accomplishments of Black people. As the past year has dramatically illustrated, Black communities, and Black women in particular, are the backbone of justice and social change.



Throughout U.S. history, Black women have nurtured families — often not our own — organized communities, led social movements and re-imagined fields like the arts and sciences. Black women’s influence radiates in every corner of American culture.

Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette knows that in the tireless effort to survive and care for ourselves, our families and our communities, Black women seldom get the support we deserve. PPCW is proud to provide the health care, education and resources that Black women need to thrive, while recognizing Black women’s heritage, achievements and future.

As reproductive justice leaders have said for years, racism is a public health crisis in our country. From targeted voter suppression to state-sanctioned violence by police, Black people consistently overcome unnecessary barriers rooted in white supremacy to keep ourselves and our communities safe.

Because of centuries of deeply entrenched institutional discrimination, bias of medical providers and economic inequality, the Black community already faces limited access to health care and a heightened risk of health complications. This has resulted in disparities in sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

According to the latest data from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes compared to white women. And recent data show that Black Americans are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 due to medical racism and structural barriers

to testing and receiving care.

The COVID-19 pandemic and maternal health crisis have shown us how deadly structural racism is to our health. For Black women, becoming a mother shouldn’t be a life-or-death decision. We need maternal health care that is compassionate, comprehensive and unbiased — and we need policies that address the urgency to save our lives.

In addition, PPCW is horrified by last month’s violent attack on the U.S. Capitol by white supremacists. This insurrection was the extension of a pattern seen across the country, as state legislatures have been threatened by paramilitaries and anti-democratic groups often aligned with white nationalist movements.

The stark difference in how police treated armed domestic terrorists storming the U.S. Capitol compared with the brutal treatment of peaceful protesters demonstrating against the murder of Black people cannot be ignored. Those protesting racial injustice this past summer were met with a militarized police force, mass arrests and tear gas.

Let’s be clear: White supremacy is terrorism. These violent assaults on our democracy cannot be tolerated, and we cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated.

This Black History Month, PPCW commits to work with Black-led organizations and elected leaders to advocate for Black communities and promote equity, especially within our healthcare system. The Biden-Harris administration has taken the first steps to rescind the global gag rule, which harms Black and Brown women most, and now it must follow through with its campaign promises for sexual and reproductive health.

Health equity is at the center of Planned Parenthood’s mission. Our first priority is, and always will be, the health and safety of our patients. We strive to see, hear and learn from Black women as a care provider and educator they can trust — no matter what.

*Sirius Bonner serves as vice president of equity and inclusion at Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette. For more information visit [ppcw.org](http://ppcw.org).*