

# Gun Violence: Connecting the Dots

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

think that these bullets fly because someone snitched or even killed a loved one,” said Hasan, a Portland native. “But I am suggesting that this is not the reason you’re shooting. But instead, it’s a symptom of the environment you find yourself in. That is the calculated manifestation of an ecosystem promoting self-hate.”

The billboard campaign is endorsed by multiple organizations, besides the No Hate Zone and I Am M.O.R.E., including the Portland Rotary Peace Builders Committee, Love is Stronger, and Books Not Bars Oregon.

Lionel Irving, who joined a gang in sixth grade and spent time in prison for gun-related violence, founded his nonprofit, Love is Stronger, to help steer current and potential gang members toward mental health services. His agency also connects Black youth to strength-based programming that will help reduce their chances of returning into the criminal-justice system.

“These are our kids and our responsibility,” Irving said. “But

the community accountability is lacking. Whatever your lane is, mother, father, uncle, brother, sister, you are obligated to say something to them with some kind words and some love. That’s the bare minimum.”

Mitchell’s years of community-empowerment work since leaving the Oregonian as a columnist in 2009 has focused on Black joy, healing, and youth development. Last year, her I Am MORE nonprofit kicked off a “Spreading Black Joy” campaign, in partnership with Children’s Community Clinic, and the Oregon Community Foundation’s Oregon Black Student Success Community Network, among others. This intergenerational creative and arts-based endeavor is intended to increase hope, healing and a sense of belonging within Oregon’s tiny Black population.

“Even with the gun violence issue, we don’t want to just focus upon deficits within our community,” Mitchell said. “We are already indoctrinated with those debilitating messages, all day every day, from our schools, in the



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/PORTLAND OBSERVER PUBLISHER  
Perlia Bell, the mother of murder victim Asia Bell, lends her support to a community campaign to prevent gun violence. Asia Bell, a beloved member of Portland’s African American community, was killed in 2002 during a walk-by shooting in front of her north Portland home.

media, with our personal experiences within society, and even the racial disparities brought out by COVID-19.

“All of these negative frame-

works continue to fertilize already existing, unprocessed trauma, which is then internalized and is also unconsciously and incontrovertibly transferred from genera-

tion to generation. So, what I Am MORE is focusing on, instead, is creating a pathway toward healing. It’s what we need most to help endure these unsettling times.”



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– Iton Udosenata, Assistant Superintendent,  
Salem-Keizer Public Schools



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