

## Gun Victims: Valuing Some Lives Over Others

The national support for the victims of the recent Colorado shootings is great. However, if we believe in the equivalency of life, what about the lives of young men in Chicago, where there have been more deaths than in Afghanistan so far this year? While the hospitals in Aurora say they will cover hospital bills for those without insurance (one in three in Colorado), who will cover bills for those who are hospitalized after a drive-by? We mourn some deaths and ignore others, which suggests that some life is valued and some life is cheap.

Does it have anything to do with media attention? In Tuscaloosa, Ala., a crazed man walked into a bar looking for “a Black man”. He shot a man who did not know him, and with whom he had no beef. He also wounded 17 other people. Why has this story received only limited national attention?

If we spend a minute watching any news, we have heard about Veronica Moser, the 6-year-old who was massacred in Aurora. We’ve seen pictures of her smiling face and of her playing. Certainly



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we can all mourn the tragedy of her young life being snuffed out by a madman. Still, some young lives are valued, while others are not. One of the young deaths that rocked my soul was the 2004 murder of Chelsea Cromartie, who sat in her grandmother’s window playing with her dolls when she was killed by a stray bullet. She wrote, in a classroom exercise, that she was an “amazing girl”. We don’t have to go back to 2004 to find a child’s death. Two weeks ago, Heaven Sutter, who had just had her hair styled for a trip to Disney World, was shot. Again the culprit was a stray bullet.

Details of the lives of those who are killed humanizes them and tugs at our heartstrings. In Aurora, we have learned about a man whose wife just gave birth, about

another who died saving his girlfriend, of a young woman who missed a Toronto mass murder by a few seconds, aspired to be a sports journalist, and was killed in Aurora. Rarely do we hear about the lives of those who are killed in the inner city, about the lives of Chelsea Cromartie and Heaven Sutter.

The disproportionality of death commentary hits home when one remembers the stories in the New York Times after September 11,

deaths in the United States in 2008. Eighty percent of the gun deaths in the world’s 23 richest countries happened in the United States, as did 87 percent of the deaths of children. We have more than 270 million privately owned guns in this country. When we add the number of military (police, sheriffs) guns, there is at least one gun for every man, woman, and child in this country. Some hark back to their Second Amendment rights in their gun ownership, but

In the same year that there were 12,000 gun deaths in the United States, there were a scant 11 gun-related deaths in Japan. Indeed, while the United States has 90 privately held guns per 100 people, the next largest per capita rate of privately held guns is in Yemen. In contrast, China has three guns per 100 people.

The National Rifle Association loves to say, “guns don’t kill, people do.” As usual, they display limited thinking. People with guns are the ones who kill! Why won’t we address that by dealing with issues of gun and ammunition control?

The 12 people who lost their lives represent a fraction of 1 percent of those who die from gun violence annually. As we mourn these lives, let us mourn the lives of the thousands who were also killed because it is easier to buy a weapon than it is to buy marijuana in most parts of our nation.

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2001. For months, postage stamp sized photos accompanied short but revealing blurbs about those who lost their lives. On one hand, the blurbs were humanizing. For me, though, they were a reminder of the equivalency of life and the lives we choose to ignore.

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the Second Amendment was passed before assault weapons and Glocks. If people have the right to bear arms, do they have to right to have 6,000 rounds of ammunition, obtained on the Internet? If we can’t limit guns, can we at least regulate the distribution of ammunition?

## Economic Dysfunction: Helping Others Build Wealth

Amazingly, Black folks in this country still don’t get it. After all we have been through and after everything we have accomplished, prior to and after integration, our relative collective economic position in America has changed very little. In some cases we have regressed in terms of ownership of land, from some 20 million acres of land (31,000 square miles) in 1910; and in our ownership of banks, of which 128 were founded between 1888 and 1934 and 64 Black-owned banks existed in 1912. As for other necessities such as supermarkets, manufacturing concerns, and distribution networks, we are not even on the economic radar screen.

In light of the latest news reports that predict yet another recession just around the corner, and the financial “cliff” from which we will soon fall, as reported on CNN’s, “Your Money,” one would

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Lamar Odom’s contribution. We just love to check in on those “wives” of wherever and listen to their vulgarity and watch their extravagance. We can’t seem to get enough of the gossip shows and things that will take us nowhere while making others quite wealthy.

Bob Law once said, “Black folks are just happy because Oprah is rich,” as he pointed out how ridiculous we have gotten when it comes to our own collective economic empowerment. He also chided us for just wanting to see a Black man in the White House – that’s all, just to know he is there.

Most of the people we follow and nearly worship are multi-millionaires and couldn’t care less

will be 18 percent of the total population at nearly 58 million persons. Those of us who were paying attention to Claud Anderson 15 years ago heard him predict just that. He also warned that if we didn’t get anything from this society when we were in second place, what do we think we will get when we fall to third place? He begged us to get prepared but we were too busy helping everyone else build up their wealth and take care of their children. As the saying goes, “It’s time to pay the piper.”

What can we do now? For starters we can look into a mirror and admit how we have played a role in our own economic demise; and then ask, “What can I do to contribute to our collective economic uplift?” Establish or get involved in a local effort to empower Black people, whether through education, politics, economics, or all three. You have to take action.

Remember when the lady on the school bus was harassed by students, and a couple of days later more than \$660,000 was raised for her through Facebook? That’s how easy it is for us to do something collectively to help ourselves, yet we fail to take advantage of models that have been and could be implemented to help ourselves.

There was, and could be again, the Blackonomics Million Dollar Club that sent money to 20 Black institutions; we tried to get just 200,000 people to send \$5 each to a designated charitable entity, but at its height there were no more than 1,000 participants involved. We have the Collective Empowerment Group (formerly Collective Banking Group) that should have a chapter in every major city across this country, but some

heads of churches are too egotistical and individualistic to get involved. We had the 10-10-50 Movement, the Nationalist Black Leadership Coalition, the Bring Back Black Movement, and even a Black-owned and operated distribution network, The MATAH. Of course there have been many more opportunities that we have squandered for lack of involvement.

Now we have the Unity Movement (myunitymovement.com), which is calling for 2 million people to simply sign up on its website in an effort to capture a critical mass of folks to begin a collective effort to inform and educate, and to start, support, and grow Black businesses. Will you at least do that?

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think Black folks are busy getting our economic act together, our history of business ownership and mutual support notwithstanding.

Sad to say, we are still floundering, enamored by the trappings of the “good life” and living vicariously through reality television shows and the shallow personalities thereon. Instead of working on our own economy we seem to be more interested in the economies of others, like the Kardashians who make about \$30 million per year, not counting

about us. They wouldn’t give most of us the time of day if we saw them on the street. Yet we idolize and follow them in all that they do, as we slip further and further behind in building (or should I say rebuilding) our collective economic base.

Recent reports cite how important the Hispanic consumer market is and that it comprises more than \$1 trillion in buying power. They also point out that Hispanics are the second largest population group in the U.S. and by 2015 they

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