

Ending Violence? More Security is Just the Start

Safety in a free, democratic society can't rely solely on armed security agents or gun laws. Laws require the consent of those who are governed by them, and the police cannot be everywhere all the time. Like it or not, our safety is based on what John Locke referred to as the social contract.

This contract carries the implicit understanding that in exchange for living with order and safety, we give up some degree of freedom. That "freedom," if we want to call it that, is the tacit agreement not to act on impulses that might lead to us harm others.

For the most part it works. We usually go about our lives without worrying if we will be attacked walking the streets, shopping, watching a movie or going to school.

The shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, serves as pointed reminder that our social contract is breaking down. That is because the most recent shooting was not an isolated incident.

In December, an armed assailant

killed two people before killing

GUEST COLUMNIST

Pedro Noguera

himself at a shopping mall in Portland, Oregon. In July, a gunman slaughtered 12 people in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. The list goes on and on.

Given the frequency of these attacks it is clear they can longer be treated as aberrations or simply explained away as actions by deranged man who had easy access to weapons. Of course, part of that is true. In each case, mentally ill men with easy access to semi-automatic assault rifles devised ways to take innocent lives.

That is why those who think that we can solve this problem through additional security and gun control alone are fooling themselves. Who knows when or where the next mentally ill killer will plot an attack?

We live in a violent society with

far too many guns, far too much anger and way too much alienation. The real problem is that the social contract is fraying. The bonds that should prevent individuals from harming one another have deteriorated.

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loner. This is important to consider because human beings are inherently social beings. People need people to survive. We need contact with others to sustain ourselves and to remind us of what it means to be human.

Schools are in some ways the most important social institutions in our society. Unlike families, social clubs and churches, which also play important roles in social-

complex as ours.

That is why when our schools are attacked and when the safety of children can no longer be taken for granted, it is devastating to the social trust that is essential to hold our society together. Some may react to the shootings at Newtown by calling for more security. Others may feel safer by homeschooling their children in the hope that this will shield them from harm.

Unfortunately, the answer will not be found in either strategy. Instead, we must find ways to strengthen our bonds, to increase our connections to each other, to embrace the alienated and to care for the mentally ill.

Our schools must lead the way in carrying out this work, just as they did more than a century ago when we struggled to integrate millions of new immigrants from Europe. We turned to our schools when our society finally came to the realization that legalized apartheid was morally reprehensi-

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As we become more atomized as a society, as alienation grows, as the social bonds that give our lives meaning -- family, community and religion -- weaken and wane, we find ourselves at greater risk.

Each of the assailants in these mass shootings was described as a

izing us, public schools accept all children, regardless of background or need. Our schools teach our children how to be members of society, and while some of what is learned may be problematic, schools nonetheless play a vital role in a society as diverse and

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Now is the Time to Talk About Guns and Mental Illness

Enough with putting off tomorrow what we should be talking about today. Enough with being afraid to step on someone's delicate sensibilities when it comes to the Second Amendment. Enough with elected leaders who are too cowardly to confront the National Rifle Association and their ardent supporters. Enough with moms and dads and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and pastors and deacons who are afraid to make public the private anguish of mental illness.

Enough! Enough! Enough!

Enough with just asking for

GUEST COLUMNIST

Roland Martin



control are quick to say, "Now is not the time."

One day after Kansas City Chiefs linebacker Jovan Belcher shot and killed his girlfriend, Kasandra Perkins, NBC Sports anchor Bob Costas said it was time to talk about this nation's fascination with guns. Instead of being hailed as an honest communicator, he was vilified for having the audacity to raise the subject at the halftime of a football game.

Have we become such a nation of cowards that we are desperate to not discuss a real issue, instead saying, "Please, shut up so I can watch the game?"

Yet today, we are glued to the television, unable to turn from the scene in Newtown, Connecticut, eager to find every new detail as to what led to the horrific mass murder of a classroom full of kindergartners.

It wasn't time to talk about this when Rep. Gabby Giffords was shot in the head, and six others were killed in January 2011. It wasn't time in July 2012 when 12 people were blown away in a movie theater in Colorado. Seven were killed at a Sikh temple near Milwaukee near August, and we were told then, "Now is not the time."

So, please, exactly when is the time?

This nation, whether we want to admit it not, is one that is fascinated and enraptured with guns. It courses through our veins like heroin shooting through the arms of an addict. We love to see it in our movies, video games, on television, and then we'll fiercely defend the right to bear arms, all

while flagrantly waving the U.S. Constitution in the face of anyone who objects.

There is absolutely no reason why we need as many guns in America. None. It simply shouldn't be the way of life others are so quick to defend. There is absolutely no doubt that we need tough and stringent gun control. Not solely to prevent murders like those in Connecticut, but to remove the option when someone is angered, depressed or in the

case of too many, mentally ill.

And that's the second issue that it's time that we come to grips with in this country: We are a nation that has chosen to either medicate or ignore altogether.

"They have a few screws loose." "You know he's off his rocker." We've heard all of the terms. We often laugh and dismiss the mentally ill in America, choosing to cross the street when we see the homeless veteran screaming and cussing at anyone who walks by.

When it's time for budget cuts, those most vulnerable often get thrown out first.

For years American cities, counties and states have shirked their responsibility when it comes to the mentally ill, choosing to abandon helping them, but quick to build a new prison to incarcerate them when a law is broken.

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thoughts and prayers. Enough with just hugging our children. Enough with leaving flowers and teddy bears at a makeshift memorial.

It's time for action. It's time for people of conscience to, in the words of the late civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, be "sick and tired of being sick and tired."

America, 20 of our children are dead, and we are all paralyzed, not knowing what to do or say. I've shed tears for the lives of the innocent children and adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Many of you have likely done the same.

We witnessed the president of the United States, Barack Obama, stand before the country fighting back tears talking about the lives lost, reminding of us other tragedies involving guns and sick individuals behind the trigger.

And every time this happened, those who refuse to discuss gun

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