

The Massive Human and Moral Cost of Gun Violence

By Marian Wright Edelman
NNPA Columnist

The heartrending massacre of 20, 6- and 7-year-old children and six educators in Newtown, Conn. has galvanized public attention once again after a mass shooting. But the killing of children by gun violence is not

new. It has been an unreported and under-reported plague that has snuffed out the lives of 119,079 children and teenagers since 1979. That's an average of 3,721 child and teen deaths every year for 32 years. That's 4,763 classrooms of 25 children each. The number of children and teens killed by guns since 1979 is two and a half times greater than the number of U.S.

military personnel killed in action in the Vietnam (47,434) or Korean (33,739) wars, and more than 22 times greater than American military personnel killed in the wars in Afghanistan (1,712) and in Iraq (3,518). The United States of America has spent a trillion and a half dollars on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars so far, purportedly to protect our children and citizens from enemies without, while ignoring the reality that the greatest threats to child safety and wellbeing come from enemies within. Gun violence saturates our children's lives and relentlessly threatens them every day. It has romped through their playgrounds; invaded their birthday parties; terrorized their Head Start classrooms, child care centers, and schools; frolicked down the streets they walk to and from school; danced through their school buses; waited at the red light and bus stop; lurked behind trees; run them down on the



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It is not only poverty that torments the Negro; it is the fact of poverty amid plenty. It is a misery generated by the gulf between the affluence he sees in the mass media and the deprivation he experiences in his everyday life.



corner; shot them through their bedroom windows, on their front porches, and in their neighborhoods. Gun violence has taught, entertained, and tantalized them incessantly across television, movie, and video game screens and the Internet. It has snatched away their parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, friends, and teachers; sapped their energy and will to learn; and made them forget about tomorrow. It has nagged and picked at their youthful minds and spirits and darkened their dreams, day in and day out, snuffing out the promise and joy of childhood and inflicting them with post-traumatic stress disorders – often chronic. It has caused them recurring nightmares and made them afraid to go outdoors or to the movies. It has made them want to or feel they have to get a gun or join a gang to protect themselves because adults can't or won't protect them. It has made them plan their own funerals because they don't think they'll live to adulthood. It has killed them with guns every three hours and fifteen minutes and injured them every 34 minutes. It terrifies them and makes them cry inside and wonder if and when enough adults are ever going to stand up and make it stop and make children safe. President Obama, in his moving remarks at the Sandy Hook interfaith prayer vigil at Newtown High School on December 16 got it right when he said: "Caring for our children. It's our first job. If we don't get that right, we don't get anything right. That's how, as a society, we will be judged." And we will not pass the test of the God of the prophets or New Testament or all great faiths if we do not protect all of our



**FAITH IS
TAKING THE
FIRST STEP
EVEN WHEN
YOU DON'T SEE
THE WHOLE
STAIRCASE.**

~Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are reminded of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words as we strive to improve and reform health care for all Oregonians.

Thank you, Dr. King,
for inspiring positive change.



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