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Killing Black Teens – Literally

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry

The death of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old honor student at King College Prep High School on Chicago's South Side is finally receiving the national attention that it deserves. An honor student and majorette in her school's marching band, Hadiya had recently participated in President Obama's inaugural parade in the nation's capital.

After leaving school on Jan. 29, Hadiya was shot and killed in a park after she and friends sought shelter under a canopy when it began raining. She was killed about a mile from Obama's Chicago home. Hadiya's father, Nathaniel Pendleton, summed up his loss this way: "They took the light of my life…She was destined for great things and you stripped that from her."

First Lady Michelle Obama, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett attended Hadiya's funeral on Saturday. Her mother, Cleopatra Cowley-Pendleton, was a guest of the Obamas at Tuesday's State of the Union address. The president is scheduled to visit Chicago on Friday where he will deliver a major address on gun violence that is certain to contain a mention of Hadiya. It's fitting that Obama return to his adopted home town to make his case against deadly violence.

According to statistics analyzed by the Chicago Reporter, more young people are killed in Chicago than any other city in the nation. More than 530 people under 21 years old have been killed since 2008 – most of them in Black and Brown neighborhoods – while hundreds of others have been injured. According to the newspaper, nearly 80 percent of youth homicides occur in 22 Black or Latino neighborhoods on the city's South, Southwest and West sides, even though those communities represent only one-third of Chicago's population."

Young people are not only the victims of gun violence – they are usually the ones who pull the trigger.

> Blacks are more than six times more likely to be homicide victims than Whites

"From 2008 through 2012, nearly half of Chicago's 2,389 homicide victims were killed before their 25th birthday. In 2011, the most recent year for which the data were available, more than 56 percent of individuals who committed murder were also under 25. One-third of Chicago residents are under 25, according to 2011 Census estimates," the Chicago Reporter states. "And despite various police strategies and community efforts, things are getting worse. Last year, 243 people under 25 were killed in Chicago. That's an 11 percent increase over 2011 and a 26 percent jump from 2010."

Chicago homicides are not limited to the youth.

The Reporter also noted, "In 2012, not only did Chicago lead the nation in homicides, it witnessed nearly 100 more murders than New York City, even though the Big Apple has three times as many residents. And Chicago witnessed 215 more murders than Los Angeles – home to more than a million more people."

Because of highly-publicized mass murders – including shooting deaths at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn.; a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado; Fort Hood, Texas and Virginia Tech – much of the gun debate has centered on reducing or eliminating access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

While those are laudable goals, some police chiefs have pointed out that handguns kill far more people than assault weapons.

In its latest report titled, "Black Homicide Victimization in the United States: An Analysis of 2010 Homicide Data," the Violence Policy Center reported: "For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 83 percent of black victims (5,073 out of 6,149) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 72 percent (3,658 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 617 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 219 victims killed by bodily force, and 162 victims killed by a blunt object."

Overall, Blacks are more than six times more likely to be homicide victims than Whites.

Citing FBI crime reports, the Violence Policy Center observed, "…In 2010 there were 6,469 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 16.32 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.42 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.66 per 100,000."

In addition to the need to address handgun violence, President Obama, Congress and law enforcement officials should acknowledge that violence is a serious problem and more often than not, the victim knew or had a relationship with the person who killed them.

"For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 70 percent of black victims (2,146 out of 3,058) were murdered by someone they knew. Nine hundred twelve victims were killed by strangers," the Violence Policy Center report stated.

If this country is serious about curbing murders, it must focus on tragic deaths, such as the murder of Hadiya Pendleton and 20 young kids in Newtown, Conn. But it must also deal with handguns and the murder of people who have or have had a relationship with their killer. Otherwise, all the tough talk on reducing violence is empty rhetoric.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service (NNPA.) He is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach.

Obamacare: Whole Foods, Whole Fools

BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

There is a Whole Foods store about three blocks from my home, and around the corner from my gym. I am enamored by the displays of produce, the red peppers contrasting the yellow ones, the kale, chard, and collard glistening from their morning sprinkle. I love the way the fish gleams back at you, char and salmon, swordfish and tilapia. When I walk over to the prepared food, I grin at the ways the veggies are layered with cheese, crumbs, and so much more. They have sandwiches that I identify with, ingredients that I salivate about. And now I must declare that I would rather drink muddy water or sleep in a hollow log that to indulge in whole foods.

I am utterly appalled that Whole Foods CEO John Mackey described Obamacare as "fascism." Fascism is an incendiary word that speaks totalitarianism, or dictatorship, and it descries it in a pejorative way. Whatever dissent there may be about Obamacare, the fact is, enough members of Congress voted for it to make it a law. John Mackey, what were you thinking when you called Obamacare (a term I proudly embrace) totalitarian and fascist? Is President Obama so mesmerizing that he forced opposing members of Congress to vote for his plan?

I had mixed feelings when the store also known as Whole Paycheck swooped into my neighborhood. People earn less hourly than the price of a pound of cheese. Most folks, though, were happy to have jobs. Happy, that is, until they complained about the terms and conditions of their work. I really didn't pay much attention, but there was a niggling sense that something was wrong

> If my words are irrelevant, keep shopping at Whole Paycheck and supporting oppression

Some of the workers grumbled outside the store. If you asked if they could help you, they were emphatically negative. I can understand folks preferring to keep their jobs than to put it out there for justice. But from the swing of the head, the cut of the eye, it was clear that all has not been good at Whole Paycheck.

Unease translated into disease for me. How dare John Mackey decide to flip his lip without a script to describe national health care as "fascism?" He seems to be trying to start a fight, to diminish a president, to ignore that vote of Congress, to put President Obama in a context that he does not deserve to be in. Fascism? One dictionary describes fascism as "a right wing nationalist ideology or movement with an hierarchical structure that is opposed to democracy and liberalism."

How did President Obama get in this mix? CEO John Mackey, unsupportive of Obamacare (as many business leaders are) chose to take opposition to another level, and decided that "fascism" was a great way to frame his ire. Then he said it didn't matter, that his word choice was careless, that his ignorance would not affect his corporate profit, that he simply misspoke. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said to support evil is to embrace evil, is to be evil. This is an evil I can gleefully walk away from. Mackey says that it doesn't matter that conscious people won't support his store. He may have a point. But I'm gong to take my little $200 a week elsewhere and I know others who will do the same thing. John Mackey, your words have been duly noted.

If my words are irrelevant, keep shopping at Whole Paycheck and supporting oppression. If you agree with me, send John Mackey a note via Libba.Letton@wholefood.com or Kate.Lowery@wholefoods.com. To use a term like "fascism" in the context of public policy is ugly and unacceptable. To cooperate is to be complicit.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.