

THE Skanner
Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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Opinion

Pride, Prejudice, and Power

June is Pride month in the United States. In big cities and small communities, LGBTQ+ people and their friends, families, and allies will celebrate freedom and progress toward full equality. All fair-minded Americans can celebrate that progress. But there is a growing shadow over this year’s celebrations. The far-right political movement is aggressively trying to turn back the clock to a time when LGBTQ+ people were not treated equally under the law. Anti-equality legal groups and anti-equality politicians are pushing legal and political attacks on our most vulnerable young people. MAGA movement political operatives are trying to win elections by stirring up fear and hatred against LGBTQ+ people.

They are proposing and passing laws that are stunning in their cruelty. Some make it a crime for librarians to let students read books with gay themes and characters—or for teachers to provide supportive information to LGBTQ+ students. Some make it a crime for doctors to provide appropriate health care to transgender youth. In Texas, parents who are simply trying to love and support their trans kids can now be charged with child abuse.

That is beyond unaccept-



Ben Jealous
Guest Columnist

able. It is sadistic. Driving the passage of those laws is a false and inflammatory campaign to portray support for LGBTQ+ people as the equivalent of pedophilia. Right-wing elected activists and pundits smear gay people as threats to children, and equality advo-

“They are proposing and passing laws that are stunning in their cruelty

cates as “groomers.” That kind of smear is dangerous. False and demonizing stereotypes have a long history that Black people know well. Lies about Black men were used by violent bigots to justify lynching as necessary to “protect” White women—and continue to drive police violence against Black people today. The more elected officials and far right-wing activists spread the “groomer”

lie, the more likely it is that some bigots will try to justify discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ people as necessary to “protect” children and youth. And then there’s the Supreme Court. Historically, it was in June that the Supreme Court overturned state laws that made gay people criminals.

A dozen years later, in another June decision, the court ruled that states cannot refuse to marry same-sex couples. June has given us many reasons to celebrate the march toward full equality. But that could all change. Thanks to hard-right justices named by former President Donald Trump, the same majority that considers states’ rights more important than voting rights is preparing to overturn Roe v. Wade—stripping Americans of a constitutional right that the court has recognized for half a century. The far-right court majority’s eagerness to eliminate a long-recognized right to privacy and abortion is deeply troubling to those of us who support legal equality. Anti-LGBTQ+ legal and political groups that urged the Court to overturn Roe v Wade are hoping the same justices will reverse more recent rulings that recognized the equality of LGBTQ+ people and same-

sex couples. They don’t just want to overturn the court’s marriage equality ruling. They also want the court to let states criminalize homosexuality, making it possible again for gay people to be fired, or have their children taken away from them, because of their sexual orientation. They want to make America discriminate again. It is time for all Americans who support equality and civil rights to reject anti-LGBTQ+ smears and the harm and the discrimination they cause. And it is time to remember that the earliest equality marches were not focused on pride, but on freedom and liberation—from police harassment, oppressive laws and culture, and institutional discrimination. Let’s celebrate pride this month. We could all use a good dance party right about now. But let’s also make sure that people understand how much progress is at risk. And let’s organize. We’re just six months away from local, state, and national elections. Those elections will either give more power to the raging anti-freedom forces that want to take the country back—or they will help us move toward the goal of freedom and justice for all.

Are American Classrooms Producing Mass Shooters?

Let’s face it. With all the mass shootings in America today, it is difficult to tease out the various motivations that prompt murderers to unleash their automatic weapons on unsuspecting and innocent individuals they do not even know.

This country being awash in guns is certainly a major contributor to the constant carnage. But a theory of “one size fits all” does not apply to these killings. Some shooters suffer from mental illness. Others have a fixation on attacking people because of their sexual orientation or religion. And then there are those who attack people because of their race or ethnicity.

We need to find ways of bringing an end to all types of shootings. But to do so, we need to understand and address the underlying factors that drive the perpetrators to commit their heinous acts. While we must address all forms of hate, I want to speak to one specific piece of this puzzle – race-based slaughter.

First, I want us to recall Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white male living in Eastover, South Carolina, who drove 98 miles to Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston and killed nine African



Oscar Blayton
Guest Columnist

Americans he did not know on June 17, 2015.

Next, I want to bring your attention to the murders that took place Aug. 3, 2019, when 21-year-old Patrick Crusius

“We need to understand and address the underlying factors

of Allen, Texas, drove more than 600 miles to kill 23 Latinx strangers at an El Paso Walmart.

Finally, on May 14, 2022, Payton Gendron, an 18-year-old white kid drove more than 200 miles from his home in Conklin, New York, and killed 10 random African American shoppers in a Buffalo supermarket.

Identifying only these three mass shootings is not to take away from the horror of the Uvalde, Texas, school shoot-

ing that took place just 10 days after Gendron went on his rampage; the San Ysidro McDonald’s massacre of 1984 in San Diego, California; the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999 in Colorado; or any of the other horrific mass murders our politicians are content to endure. But Roof, Crusius and Gendron were all white males, 21-years-old or younger at the time they committed their massacres and had very little time to be influenced by anything other than their socialization by their family and their educational experiences.

Public policy cannot invade the family dinner table and dictate what parents teach their children, but responsible citizens must wonder what type of education these young men received in the schools they attended. It appears that all three attended public high schools; Roof attended at least two.

Is it legitimate to ask if some of the ideas and beliefs they acquired in high school led these mass shooters to be susceptible to targeting Black and Latinx victims based solely on their race or ethnicity?

As rabid white supremacists howl about the damage done to their children by

being exposed to the truth about American history, is it possible that in many classrooms across America, seeds of bigotry and hate are being planted in the minds of some white children so that they grow to become shooters like Dylann Roof, Patrick Crusius and Payton Gendron?

It was not that long ago when schools in southern states were segregated by law. Today, schools in every sector of the country are racially imbalanced because of historical housing patterns created by a string of racist policies. So, is it unreasonable to take a closer look at our educational system to see what practices in our classrooms might possibly have a hand in creating mass murderers driven by racial hatred?

Racial hatred exists in the United States. We witness it every day and feel its effects throughout our entire lives. To witness it and not investigate its source is as irresponsible as denying that such hatred exists. What’s worse than either of these are the multiple attempts across America to lock away the history of this hatred so it cannot be addressed.

Read the rest of this commentary at
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