

# We must work to decrease gun violence

By Marian Wright Edelman  
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We must face the hard truth that firearms are so easy to acquire in the United States that lethal mass shootings are mathematically inevitable. Our nation was stunned by Cho Seung Hui's shooting spree at Virginia Tech University where he killed 32 students and professors and wounded 15. As we mourn these deaths, we are left with two unavoidable questions: Could this horrific act of violence have been avoided? And, what do we do about it? Neither question is easy to answer in a nation with over 200 million privately owned firearms including 65 million handguns.

The gun violence of the United States is an anomaly among most industrialized democracies. Other countries place many more impediments on gun ownership. Here, virtually anyone can obtain a gun, even someone as profoundly disturbed as Cho Seung Hui. In the standard background check, in the form of a call to the state police, Cho was not flagged as a prohibited purchaser. The fact that he had been institutionalized with a mental illness that caused him to present an imminent danger to himself and others did not show up in either the state or federal database.

Cho Seung Hui fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition striking his victims more than

200 times. He also missed some of his targets. If Congress had renewed the Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994, Cho Seung Hui wouldn't have had 15-round magazines for his Glock pistol. The ban prohibited magazines that carry more than 10 bullets. That would have forced him to stop and reload more often, perhaps saving some lives.

Unlike the bloody assault at Virginia Tech, most people killed by firearms die as single victims. They are male and female and represent all races and age groups. Each year, thousands of children and teens are victims of gun violence.

The most recent figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that 2,825 children and teens died from gunshots in 2004. Every four days, nearly 32 children are killed by guns in a relentless assault of gun violence against children. About as many children and teens were killed by firearms in America in 2004 as the total number of American service men and women who died in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since those wars began. Fifty-eight preschoolers were killed by firearms that year compared to 57 law enforcement officers.



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Shooting deaths occur in homes, in play areas, on our streets and children's schools, day in and day out. But we don't act to control gun proliferation.

As we were painfully reminded recently, our children are not safe even at school. There were many other school shootings before Cho Seung Hui killed 32 people at Virginia

Tech. In October 2006, a truck driver shot 11 girls, killing five, in an Amish schoolhouse near Paradise, Pa. Two teenagers killed 12 fellow students and a teacher at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colo., in April 1999. A 15-year-old Springfield, Ore., boy shot both of his parents dead, then killed two classmates and wounded 25 others in May 1998. Two middle school students, ages 11 and 13, shot four students and a teacher and wounded 11 classmates in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in March 1998. Other deadly school shootings have taken place in Paducah, Ky; Edinboro, Penn; Pearl, Miss. ...the list is long. In each case, the shooters had easy access to firearms.

Our nation's leaders must enact and enforce common sense gun safety laws that check the flow of firearms into our communities. These deadly instruments of destruc-

tion are a grave threat to everyone. We need legislation that requires thorough background checks for every gun sale. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms must receive sufficient funds to pursue corrupt gun dealers and black marketers aggressively. Stiffer anti-trafficking laws must be adopted nationwide. And the Assault Weapons Ban must be reinstated immediately.

Parents and community leaders have a responsibility as well. They should remove guns from their homes; organize nonviolent conflict resolution support groups in their congregations and communities; and refuse to buy video games and other products that glamorize or make violence socially acceptable or fun for their youngsters and teens. Community leaders must turn schools and places of worship into venues of quality summer and after-school programs for children as positive alternatives to the streets. Communities should also adopt proven programs like Operation Ceasefire that encourage collaboration among families, faith groups, social service providers and the police to stop gun violence against and by children and teens.

The Second Amendment should not be construed as authorization to put guns in the hands of mass killers. We can not just wring our hands and do nothing until the faces of a  
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## Africa missing from Democrats' initial debate

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

We cannot overestimate the importance of the presidential campaign for 2008. The world is in a big mess. China throws all the rules to the wind as they develop into a massive economic monster. Russia is yearning for the days of old, The Cold War. Genocide and suffering is bigger now than ever before while a corrupt UN, IMF and World Bank seem to be useless. The United States leadership role in the world is being questioned like never before. Now is the time for a true leader to step forward. We need someone to present a vision that addresses all the major problems with solutions that can quickly turn around fear, death and horror with hope, progress and prosperity.

On the evening of April 26 at the HBCU campus of South Carolina State University, the Democratic Party held its first debate involving eight declared candidates. In essence, it was quite cordial.

All the candidates held mutual respect for each other and there were no personal attacks. They concentrated on various issues. The

biggest issue was, naturally, the Iraq civil war. There is no text book approach to it but they all agreed that we must get out as soon as possible — somehow, somehow. Then came the usual issues such as ethics, abortion, guns, healthcare, taxation, immigration, education, fuel costs, international relations (generally speaking), gay marriage, global climate change and Cuba.

We waited and waited but never heard the issue of Africa addressed for the whole ninety minutes. There were a quick "half sentences" about Darfur mixed in with other matters by Senators Biden and Edwards and Governor Richardson. There was no statement of substance given to the continent at all. There is just no way this campaign can go on and ignore 1 billion people who are suffering from the intrusion and adverse policy of Europeans, Americans, et al.

Africa should be at the top of every political agenda. People are dying by the mil-



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lions as a result of war, HIV/AIDS, corruption and meddling from the First World operatives. The western hemisphere has over 200 million descendants of Africa and we want the current state of affairs to change dramatically for the better.

How can anyone striving to become the president of the United States, leader of the free world, omit or ignore the state of affairs on the African continent. Who are the advisors and managers of these campaigns that think they can get away with this? Are they trying to assume the Black vote again?

I am extremely disappointed in Barack Obama who is the son of an African. How can he stand there for 90 minutes and not mention the problems and plight of this whole continent. He is even on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; but, when asked, "What are the three most serious international problems?" he mentioned Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Is he so presumptuous that

he need not address our concerns? It reminds me of a statement he made about Michael Steele, a Black running for U.S. Senate, "Don't vote for a person solely because of his race." That applies to you, too, Senator Obama.

We want to know what you will do for the African Diaspora. Say it and say it loud! Of course, you must first start thinking about it. As one pundit stated, "He was the most abstract politician I have ever watched." Remember, Senator, it is not what you are but what you stand for and believe.

What about Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton? She and her husband resided at the White House when the atrocious horror of Rwanda took place. They just stood by and watched it happen. Afterwards, her husband President Bill Clinton issued an apology. After millions of deaths it was too little, too late. She should be particularly interested in the genocides of Darfur and Congo, plus the wars in Somalia and other regions. What is her opinion on Zimbabwe among other hotbeds? Does she or the rest of them have a concern?

It is clear. The Democratic campaign is void of a concern for Africa and it is the responsibility of the citizens of the United States, particularly the 40 million plus African Americans, to raise the issue and demand proposed solutions with stipulated action.

America can do something about the dire state of this continent and, as God as our witness, we — African-Americans — must demand it. Let's make this a major issue in this campaign. Candidates from both sides must become adept at the status of Africa and must provide viable solutions that can be readily carried out. Those who don't must not get our vote or support.

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## Clingman

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of programming we want to see. She said she gets feedback from her teenaged daughter who watches the shows on BET; you know, so they can bring us the shows we want to see, like "Beef," "American Gangster," and degrading buffoonery, and, oh yeah, those great videos that Russell Simmons is railing against now.

Will Puffy or Diddy with his diamonds, Jay-Z with his champagne, Fifty-Cent with his bullet wounds, Snoop Dogg with his golden chalice, and the rest of them with their cars, trucks, grills, 24-inch rims, and chinchilla coats, take Simmons' path and get re-

ligion about the words they use? Will they, now that they have made their money off those same words? Will the executives continue to exploit the industry and continue to hide? And will the corporations looking to sell Black folks everything from soda pop to gym shoes continue to slither around and find ways to make their billions from the hip-hopsters, too?

It seems we have totally bought in to what Nino Brown said about things not being personal, just business. We have been lulled to sleep by the shining cars and fists full of dollars being displayed by the rappers. And we have fallen, once again, for feel-good, couch-

talk reflections and introspection from the hip-hop elite.

One thing we can be sure of though. Amid this episode of "Hip-Hopcrisy," at least one of the elite will remain "true to da game" as they say. Snoop admitted he was talking about b\*\*\*\*s and h\*s by saying, "We're talking about ho's that's in the 'hood that ain't doing sh—, that's trying to get a n—a for his money."

No hip-hopcrisy in the Dogg, folks. I guess that's what's called "keepin' it real."

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