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on issues affecting African Americans  
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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

**A Philly Tragedy Reminds Us of America's Gun Lust  
Color of Law**

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**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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There's a story out of Philadelphia that's enough to break your heart.

On April 21, a man [shot his girlfriend to death in front of her 11-year old daughter](#), then turned the gun on himself and committed suicide. Aleen Ali, 45, a supervisor at the city's Department of Human Services (DHS), walked up to the car of Angela Jeffreys, 34, who was about to take her daughter to school, and stood silently as he started firing. Jeffreys, a clerk at the Criminal Justice Center, was a single mother who also had two other children - one in high school and another in college. Ali left a wife, also an administrator at DHS, and an 18-month-old baby. Jeffreys' daughter was taken to the local police station, still wearing her school uniform. The police found eight shell casings.

So now, after this senseless loss of two lives, four children have lost a parent. And for what? I am sure that at this point, someone reading this commentary will recite the usual gun rights drivel, that guns don't kill people, people kill people, that although this was a tragedy, nothing could be done. Most of all, I just love the argument that the second amendment gives us a constitutional right to own as many guns as we please, and that we need more guns to protect us from the "criminals". Well, I disagree. Many people are pretending they are unaware that more of these deadly incidents are occurring these days.

In Pittsburgh, there was the racist man who [killed three police officers](#). He hated Obama, and said he would defend himself if anyone tried to take his guns. In Binghamton, NY, there was the Vietnamese immigrant who [killed 13 people at an immigrant services center](#), and then committed suicide. And in California, an unemployed hospital technician [shot his five children and wife to death](#) before taking his own life.

And it all seems to point back to the same thing: this country has too many guns, over 200 million privately-owned weapons to be exact. That includes handguns, rifles, and shotguns, and millions more are added to that amount each year. In my humble opinion, the existence of so many guns seems to be particularly hazardous in a pathologically unstable nation such as the United States. This nation boasts an alarming combination of systemic chronic unemployment and a lack of opportunity, with substantial segments of the population with low levels of education and no marketable skills, and inadequate methods of conflict resolution. Throw in widespread undiagnosed and untreated mental illness, and a rise in activity among right-wing extremist hate groups, and you have a recipe for disaster. Plus, to make things worse, we are exporting our violence to Mexico with a drug war fueled by American weapons.

Not wanting to go off half-cocked without looking at the destruction caused by guns in America each year, I decided to consult the statistics. And I must say, the statistics are sobering:

- According to the [Brady Campaign To Prevent Gun Violence](#), the U.S. leads the world in firearm violence. Gun violence costs the U.S. \$100 billion each year in medical costs, mental health treatment and rehabilitation, loss of productivity, and legal and judicial costs.
- In 2005, **over 100,000 people in America were shot** in murders, assaults, suicides, accidents or by police. Nearly 31,000 of them died. To put things in perspective, 33,651 Americans died in the Korean War, and 47,369 in Vietnam. On average, each day 280 people are shot in the U.S. 84 people die from gun violence, and 34 of them are murdered.
- In 2004, guns were used to murder 56 people in Australia, 184 people in Canada, 73 people in England and Wales, 5 people in New Zealand, and 37 people in Sweden. In comparison, firearms were used to murder 11,344 in the United States.
- In 2006, there were only 154 justifiable homicides by private citizens using handguns in the U.S.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, **American children are at a greater risk of death from firearms than in any other industrialized nation.** In one year, firearms killed no children in Japan, 19 in Great Britain, 57 in Germany, 109 in France, 153 in Canada, and 5,285 in the United States. On average, 8 children die from guns every day in the U.S.
- The Brady Campaign reports that keeping a firearm in the home triples the risk of suicide and increases the risk of suicide with a firearm by a factor of 17. States with high household gun ownership have higher suicide rates than those with low gun ownership. In 2005, 17,002 Americans killed themselves with a gun, 2,300 of them were youths (between ages 10-25). Fifty percent of youth suicides are with a gun, making it the fourth leading cause of death in that age group. Eighty-five percent of youths under 18 used a family member's firearm.
- Unfortunately, guns and domestic violence go hand in hand. A 2003 study found that an abused woman was 6 times more likely to be murdered if there was a gun in the home.
- In 2005, 1,791 women were murdered through the use of a gun. 1,181 women were killed by their intimate partners - over 30% of all murders of women - and

57% of those women were killed by firearms. And from 1990 to 2005, more than two-thirds of murdered spouses and ex-spouses were killed by guns.

- Young African-American women are murdered by firearms at a rate five times higher than White women. The rate for young Latinas is almost 80% higher than Whites.
- African Americans are affected disproportionately by gun violence. Although they are 12% percent of the population, they account for 26% of firearm-related deaths. The Brady Campaign notes that **7,865 Black people die every year** due to gun violence. Further, although suicide accounts for a majority (55%) of gun-related deaths in the U.S., in the Black community, homicide accounts for an overwhelming majority (84%) of all gun-related deaths.
- Homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American males between ages 15-34. Between ages 15-24, 90% of the murders are committed with guns. Between ages 24-34, 87% are committed with guns.
- Murder is the second leading cause of death for Blacks ages 10-14, and the third leading cause of death for the 5-9 age range, with guns accounting for 70% and 34% of these deaths, respectively.

Now, if these are acceptable statistics, then there is nothing left to say. And we will chalk it up as a small price to pay for preserving our freedom to shoot each other up when we want to do so.

But if reason prevails, it is clear that such levels of violence are incompatible with a stable, viable society. Why is it easier, in the so-called land of plenty, for a poor person to find a gun - or a prison cell, for that matter - than it is to find a job, a quality education, or even a nutritious meal? Why do some state legislatures legalize the carrying of concealed weapons, in some cases [to the workplace](#) and on [college campuses](#)? How did an obscure and anachronistic amendment dealing with standing militias suddenly morph into a private right to on-demand firearm possession? Exactly what is going on here?

An old colleague of mine who has since passed said it best. He defined a law as that which is bought and paid for. And what we're seeing now with the gun control war is a perfect example of that.

There is a reason why the Senate defeated the bankruptcy reform bill, which would have allowed bankruptcy judges to renegotiate mortgages and help people stay in their homes. [The loan sharks](#) - the mortgage banks that received all that bailout money - used millions of that bailout money to pay the senators to kill it. As Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois said recently, "And the banks - hard to believe in a time when we're facing a banking crisis that many of the banks created - are still the most powerful lobby on Capitol Hill. And they frankly own the place." No principled stands, no acting for the good of the county, just money.

If the Employee Free Choice Act (EPCA) does not pass, it is because Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Bank of America and others will buy off the Congress. Similarly, if universal healthcare fails in the Congress, then someone will have paid for that, too.

There is a reason why you have three-strikes laws and other draconian sentencing policies that have caused prisons to burst at the seams with overcrowding in California and other states. Private prison corporations and correctional officers' unions paid for

those laws and got their money's worth. And there is a reason why nearly two-thirds of the prisoners in America are people of color, and yet the legal profession is over 90% White. Someone has paid for the laws and policies that set all of this in motion.

And as for the gun lobby, the weapons manufacturers, they have poured millions into the Congress. [Politico](#) reported that between 1997 and 2006, the National Rifle Organization (NRA) spent almost \$16 million on outside lobbyists that worked alongside its five in-house lobbyists. And between 1990 and 2006, the NRA spent \$16 million in campaign contributions - 83% to Republicans - not to mention the millions of dollars it spent in advertising. Their ultimate goal is a nation without gun laws. We shall see if they get their way.

No good can come from the barrel of the gun, and this nation's long tradition of gun worship has been a story of violence, fear and intimidation, genocide, lynching, shortened lives, unrealized dreams and devastated communities. We cannot begin to count the number of orphans and widows this nation has created in the process. But society can decide if it wants this gun madness to end.


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[Contents of Issue](#)  
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