

## **NO EXCUSE FOR GUN VIOLENCE BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX**

Jasmine Lynn, a Spelman sophomore, was killed by a stray bullet as she walked on the campus of Clark Atlanta University on September 2 just after midnight. She was chatting with friends not far from the place where six shots were fired during a fight at Clark Atlanta. One of her friends heard the gunshot, saw the weapon, and yelled for Jasmine to get on the ground. But as she moved to the ground she was shot in the chest, and died shortly thereafter.

The nineteen year old student from Kansas City, Missouri is one of approximately 2500 black youth 15-24 who die each year from gun homicide. African American youth are more likely than any other group of young people to be killed by guns. In contrast 950 Hispanic youth and 600 white youth die from gun homicide. Can we really afford to lose 2500 young people each year to this horrible violence? What are we prepared to do about it?

My heart breaks for Jasmine's family, and also for the Spelman family who gathered Thursday to mourn one of their own. It is ironic that last week was HBCU week. The commemoration was anchored with a presidential proclamation, and a conference that drew dozens of HBCU presidents, including Spelman's Dr. Beverly Daniels Tatum, to Washington DC. I cannot imagine Dr. Tatum's horror in leaving a dinner that celebrated HBCU's and returning to a campus tragedy.

Of course, Jasmine's death is not only a campus tragedy, because gun homicide is so prevalent in our community (with more than six youngsters being shot each day), it is an African American tragedy, a national tragedy. Jasmine, or another young woman, could have been shot almost anywhere. Actually, not almost anywhere. She probably could not have been shot in the lobby of an upscale hotel.

It is unlikely that she would have been shot in a wealthy suburb of Atlanta. People know better than to bring guns to those places, and to exchange shots in those places. But in inner-city neighborhoods, it is apparently okay to pull guns out, regardless of what is going on around you, and just shoot. Infants have been killed by flying bullets. Young girls sitting in their aunt's front room have had their lives shortened by thugs who, on a public street, decided to disregard the vibrant neighborhood life around them and have a shoot-out.

How many of us will get as excited about gun violence as about racist minutiae? How many of us are actually willing to rail against the guns that have seeped into the hands of mostly young black men who are costing us thousands of lives each year. What do we lose when we lose these lives? We lose scholars and mothers, chemists and diplomats, young people whose potential has not yet been defined, potential snuffed out because of gun violence.. As much as African American leaders rail about social ills, we must rail about these guns that cut too many lives short.

It is time to stop the socioeconomic litany of excuses to explain

high rates of crime in our community, and especially the senseless violence that costs us 10,000 lives every four years. It is time for us to declare, in the most emphatic terms, that this is behavior that cannot be excused, cannot be tolerated. I am talking to myself as much as to anyone when I say it is time to draw a line in the sand with all of the excuses that we make for folk who choose, let me repeat, choose, to use guns to resolve disputes, notwithstanding the innocent bystanders who may be killed. 'We have all heard it all -- about the proliferation of guns in our community, the escalation of violence, issues of "self esteem", and so on. Legislatively we can fight to stop the proliferation of guns, and we should fight the National Rifle Association and all of those folks who seem to want to make firearms more readily assessible, regardless of the consequences. Morally, however, we must say that this violence is unacceptable, that we have zero tolerance for it, and that it must stop.

We talk lots about racial disparities -- health disparities, economic disparities, and other disparities, and we can get very detailed about the ways these disparities affect our community. Here's a disparity -- an African American youth is 18 times more likely to die in a firearms homicide than a white youth. And for every youngster killed by a gun four are injured. Indeed, one of the young people walking with Jasmine Lynn was struck in the wrist by another of the stray bullets. Firearms rank as the leading cause of death for black youth. If we believe our rhetoric that children are our future, then we ought to do something about gun violence, especially gun violence among young people.

Many young people are organizing to educate themselves and each other about the heavy toll of violence. Last year, two students at North Carolina A&T State University were killed in random violence. The student body presidents of North Carolina A&T and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro joined with Bennett College student body president Meshia White to lead hundreds of their peers through downtown Greensboro in a stop the violence rally. I was proud of our students for taking a stand, but now seasoned leaders must lend them both a hand and strong voices to say "enough". Not just because of Jasmine Lynn. Because of 2500 a year. Because this violence is corrosive and enough is enough.