



There can be few scenes sadder than what transpired Saturday in Chicago when children with tear stained cheeks solemnly said goodbye to their friend and classmate, Hadiya Pendleton. The 15 year-old honor student was laid to rest in her favorite color – purple – after becoming the latest victim of random gun violence in her city. Perhaps it was because she was such a promising bright light, a friendly and passionate young woman who seemed destined for success that made her death so tragic and maddening. Every movement needs a singular act of outrage to draw attention to the larger struggle. During the civil rights movement, the killing of four little girls in the bombing of a Birmingham Alabama church was such a moment that outraged a nation and elevated the horrors of Jim Crow in the nation’s consciousness.

The murder of Hadiya Pendleton has the makings of such a moment in the struggle to control guns in our country and stem the acts of depravity caused by firearms.

Watching the funeral over the live webcast made available by Chicago superstation WGN-TV reminded me of similar scenes that have played out time and again in our nation’s cities. So many young lives cut short, so many mothers and fathers left with broken hearts, and communities incensed by the senseless violence that seems to get passing attention from most of the nation. Something is different this time; at least that is what I feel in my gut. Chicago has become the symbol of the urban killing field, cities where law doesn’t matter and life even less. Whether it is Chicago, Newark, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, Rochester, New Orleans or any American metropolis, the obituary pages of the daily papers are filled with the tragedies of gun violence. However, I sense Hadiya’s death is different.

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Written by Walter Fields

Friday, 15 February 2013 18:12 -

It is different enough to demand the presence of the First Lady, Secretary of Education and a high ranking presidential adviser at Hadiya's funeral. While some criticize the President for not attending, it was the first time such a high level White House contingent had attended the funeral of a child killed by urban violence. It sends the message that Black and Latino children matter; and that our nation grieves over their deaths just as much as we wept for the children murdered in Newtown, the high school students at Columbine and the students at Virginia Tech University.

Perhaps we brought in to the imagery of the toughness of urban youth to the point that we began to care less about their plight. After all, every movie and music video paints city kids, and particularly Black males, as treacherous and cutthroat, too tough to cry or give a damn; and too preoccupied with material gain and "getting paid" for us to be concerned about their welfare. Folks who feel that way should have watched Hadiya's funeral and her young friends speak bravely about her bright light and the cowards who took her away from them. It was a moment of profound truth that was overwhelming as much as it was enlightening.

How can we as a nation claim to be an advanced civilization if we can't save our children? We have succumbed to complacency and allowed silly and nonsensical claims of constitutional privilege take precedence over the lives of our children. We are lost. Our moral compass has failed and we are now taking directions from individuals in our country who care little about our community and even less about our children. Hadiya's death should rile us in the same manner as the killing of Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Denise McNair in the 16th Street Baptist Church and the murder of Emmett Till. We need to harbor the same type of anger, yes anger, for the thugs responsible for the bloodshed in our communities and the gun lobby and firearms manufacturers that are merchants of death as we did for the cowardly Klansmen in white hoods and robes during Jim Crow.

I have gazed downward on the bodies of young people in their coffins, silenced by gunfire and those images remain seared in my brain. The wails of grief stricken parents and siblings still reverberate in my head, as does the sudden finality of life when the coffin is lowered in the ground. It doesn't have to come to this. We have allowed this madness to consume our children and it is time to stop it. There should be no place for killers among us to find comfort and security. Technology exists now that should be employed to protect witnesses, so we can begin to remove this cancer from our community. It is time to restore the respect for life and humanity that has been taken away from us.

My hope is that the life of Hadiya Pendleton will spur us to action. It is her life, and the potential that was snuffed out by a coward's bullet, that should be the motivation for all of us to fight the

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scourge of gun violence in our community. If we cannot protect our children we have no right to call ourselves men and women, and even less to claim ourselves faithful to God.

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