

Forum

Domestic Disarmament Urgent

I'm always amazed how Americans outraged over incidents like the attacks on U.S. soldiers in Somalia can stay calm about the carnage here at home.

More Americans are killed by firearms each year than were killed in the entire Korean War. Every quarter of an hour, another American dies of bullet wounds.

And with increasing frequency those Americans are small children, caught in the crossfire of drug gang shoot-outs or shot by another children who have access to weapons.

The same day last month that a U.S. helicopter was shot down in Somalia killing three soldiers, four people, including a four year old, were shot and killed within sight of the U.S. Capitol.

This is a nation whose capitol city, Washington, D.C., is becoming the murder capitol of the world; where an estimated 20 percent of school-children carry weapons, where over 15,000 people were killed by firearms last year.

We are the best-armed people in the world, but far from the safest.

Some 67 million handguns circulate among the population, and probably twice that number of other firearms.

"We need guns for safety," is the standard response of those who oppose handgun bans or other limitations on firearms.

But the opposite is true—the mere presence of guns make us less safe.

A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine reports that people in home with guns were almost three times more likely to experience a homicide than people in homes without guns.

Other studies have shown that easy availability of guns in a city results in higher homicide rates.

Until now, passing restrictive gun laws has been next to impossible. But the tide may be turning.

New Jersey and Virginia passed handgun

control laws this year and some states are also outlawing assault rifles, commonly used by drug gangs.

And Congress is finally seriously considering the so-called "Brady Bill," which would impose a waiting period for gun-buyers. The bill may finally pass this year after being smothered in committees for years.

But those laws stop far short of the domestic disarmament that is so urgently needed.

No one disputes the right of people to use weapons in hunting or other sports, but since when are assault rifles and handguns sporting goods?

Proposals have ranged from an outright ban on all sales of guns to national registration programs for guns and their owners.

Some people would outlaw all gun import



TO BE EQUAL

By JOHN E. JACOB

and limited domestic production. Other would place high taxes on guns to recoup some of the estimated \$1.5 billion in health care cost associated with shooting.

It wouldn't surprise me to see some of those ideas turned into law before too long.

Public disgust at the slaughter has become too great for even well-heeled lobbies to overcome. And as politicians respond to their constituents' demands for stricter gun laws, they are beginning to understand that they can defy the gun lobby and get away with it.

Polls indicate that a solid majority of Americans, including gun owners, back stricter controls on guns.

It's time to stop the violence, and it is clear that the way to regain control of our streets is to get control of the guns that are turning our neighborhood into war zones.

A Pledge For Our Children

Please join me in pledging allegiance to our children, to their growth, their well-being and their future.

I pledge to:

Listen to my children. Take time and really HEAR them. Look them in the eye and feel what they're saying, even when they're searching for the words to express what they don't yet understand. Listen between the lines for their emotions. Let them know you're always there with an open ear, heart and mind.

Communicate with my children. Ask them the hard questions, even when you think you can't do it. Get into their business; they won't like it, but it's your responsibility.

Tell them the truth, even when it's the hardest thing in the world to do. Talk with them about sex, drugs, violence, crime, and keep the lines of communication open. Talk with them also about your family history, the history of our people and the legacy of overcoming any obstacles in our paths.

Teach my children right from wrong and be a good role model for them. In a world where our values have been so perverted, it is our responsibility to chart and lead a course toward higher moral ground. And since our children pay far more attention to our actions than to our words, I promise to practice what I preach, without exception.

Spend time with and pay attention to my children. This isn't easy in today's world. With the competing demands of work, family and day-to-day survival, we're often racing the clock. But we've got to create opportunities to focus on our children and make them the center of our attention. It doesn't cost money or require any special tools. Read to your children and have them read to you. Make up poems and songs; draw pictures; take photographs. Your children don't need the latest toys or technology as much as they need your attention. Let them know how important they are to you.

Educate my children in mind, body and soul. Our children's education doesn't begin and end at school. Surveys reveal that young people consistently rate their parents as their greatest heroes and role models. As their first and most significant teachers, we have the obligation and the opportunity to set the stage for lifelong learning. Monitor their TV viewing and when you do watch TV, do it together and use what you see to teach them the lessons of

life. Eat—and feed them—a healthy diet and exercise together, even if it means having them teach you the latest dance steps.

Remember their spiritual development. Whether or not you attend church regularly, talk with your children about God and your spiritual beliefs. Give them a sense of faith and hope, and respect for a power greater than themselves.

Work to provide a stable family life for my children. Families come in many shapes and sizes today, and stability is the most important factor in a child's well-being. Keep as much continuity in their lives as possible, and when change comes, think first about their needs and

teach them to cope with it in positive, healthy ways. Let your children know that you will always be there for them, no matter what life may bring.

Pray for and see God in my children and all children. Share your prayers with your children and encourage them to pray on their own. Remember that no matter how your children are behaving, they are God's creation and your responsibility. See the good in them even at moments when it isn't visible to the naked eye! And see the value of all children and remember them in your prayers as well.

Vote for my children to ensure them fair treatment and opportunity. Children can't vote, but we can and we must keep their needs in mind when supporting and selecting our political leadership. Pay attention to what candidates and representatives do on behalf of children. You are your children's greatest advocate. Use your power to speak and act on their behalf. Our children and families are facing one of the worst crises since slavery, and we've got to do something about it. Our voices united in concern can make a mighty roar. And by supporting effective groups, we build a stronger foundation for every child's future.

This pledge is available on church fans and on the Black Community Crusade for Children poster. The fans are free and the posters cost \$16.00. Call 1-800-ASK-BCCC to order yours or to learn how you can become part of the Black Community Crusade for Children to Leave No Child Behind.

Doonesbury

BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CHILD WATCH

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The Forgotten West

On closer examination, cowboys such as Deadwood Dick, Cherokee Bill, Bill Pickett and Jim Beckworth may have worn a white hat, but not a White skin. That's why I went to Texas and talked to descendants of these heroic men and the women who also pioneered the West.

Before I go on, let me test you with a little American history quiz:

1. What Black trapper became chief of the Crow Indians?
2. What black rodeo star is said to have invented the art of bulldogging?
3. Who chopped down the cherry tree and could not tell a lie? If you only got number three correct, you don't know much about the forgotten west. But that's understandable.

The image of the men and women who shaped the West has usually been painted with White faces. They were the settlers who struggled against tremendous odds, the notorious outlaws

and the rugged, free-spirited cowboys. Over the years, the cowboy has emerged as America's macho hero. He is symbolic of the glorified era of the Old West and his lifestyle has been romanticized in movies, television and novels. The projected image of this national hero has usually been Anglo-Americans wearing wide-brimmed hats, getting up at the crack of dawn, herding cattle, roping calves, totin' guhs, as they say, and sleeping under the stars with their faithful horses. Little is known about the Afro-Americans who helped to settle the



TONY BROWN

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Western frontier — the desperadoes and Black cowboys who numbered in the thousands.

You can get the answers on Tony Brown's Journal on PBS between Nov. 12 through Nov. 18. Check with your public television for exact time and date.