

Celebrating the Prince of Peace in the Land of Guns

By Michael Moore: 12/24/2012

After watching the deranged, delusional National Rifle Association press conference on Friday, it was clear that the Mayan prophecy had come true. Except the only world that was ending was the NRA's. Their bullying power to set gun policy in this country is over. The nation is repulsed by the massacre in Connecticut, and the signs are everywhere: a basketball coach at a post-game press conference; the Republican Joe Scarborough; a pawn shop owner in Florida; a gun buy-back program in New Jersey; a singing contest show on TV, and the conservative gun-owning judge who sentenced Jared Loughner.

So here's my little bit of holiday cheer for you:

These gun massacres aren't going to end any time soon.

I'm sorry to say this. But deep down we both know it's true. That doesn't mean we shouldn't keep pushing forward -- after all, the momentum is on our side. I know all of us -- including me -- would love to see the president and Congress enact stronger gun laws. We need a ban on automatic AND semiautomatic weapons and magazine clips that hold more than 7 bullets. We need better background checks and more mental health services. We need to regulate the ammo, too.

But, friends, I would like to propose that while all of the above will certainly reduce gun deaths (ask Mayor Bloomberg -- it is virtually impossible to buy a handgun in New York City and the result is the number of murders per year has gone from 2,200 to under 400), it won't really bring about an end to these mass slayings and it will not address the core problem we have. Connecticut had one of the strongest gun laws in the country. That did nothing to prevent the murders of 20 small children on December 14th.

In fact, let's be clear about Newtown: the killer had no criminal record so he would never have shown up on a background check. All of the guns he used were legally purchased. None fit the legal description of an "assault" weapon. The killer seemed to have mental problems and his mother had him seek help, but that was worthless. As for security measures, the Sandy Hook school was locked down and buttoned up BEFORE the killer showed up that morning. Drills had been held for just such an incident. A lot of good that did.

And here's the dirty little fact none of us liberals want to discuss: The killer only ceased his slaughter when he saw that cops were swarming onto the school grounds -- i.e, the men with the guns. When he saw the guns a-coming, he stopped the bloodshed and killed himself. Guns on

police officers prevented another 20 or 40 or 100 deaths from happening. Guns sometimes work. (Then again, there was an armed deputy sheriff at Columbine High School the day of that massacre and he couldn't/didn't stop it.)

I am sorry to offer this reality check on our much-needed march toward a bunch of well-intended, necessary -- but ultimately, mostly cosmetic-- changes to our gun laws. The sad facts are these: Other countries that have guns (like Canada, which has 7 million guns -- mostly hunting guns -- in their 12 million households) have a low murder rate. Kids in Japan watch the same violent movies and kids in Australia play the same violent video games (*Grand Theft Auto* was created by a British company; the UK had 58 gun murders last year in a nation of 63 million people). They simply don't kill each other at the rate that we do. Why is that? THAT is the question we should be exploring while we are banning and restricting guns: Who *are* we?

I'd like to try to answer that question.

We are a country whose leaders officially sanction and carry out acts of violence as a means to often an immoral end. We invade countries who didn't attack us. We're currently using drones in a half-dozen countries, often killing civilians.

This probably shouldn't come as a surprise to us as we are a nation founded on genocide and built on the backs of slaves. We slaughtered 600,000 of each other in a civil war. We "tamed the Wild West with a six-shooter," and we rape and beat and kill our women without mercy and at a staggering rate: every three hours a woman is murdered in the USA (half the time by an ex or a current); every three minutes a woman is raped in the USA; and every 15 seconds a woman is beaten in the USA.

We belong to an illustrious group of nations that still have the death penalty (North Korea, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran). We think nothing of letting tens of thousands of our own citizens die each year because they are uninsured and thus don't see a doctor until it's too late.

Why do we do this? One theory is simply "because we can." There is a level of arrogance in the otherwise friendly American spirit, conning ourselves into believing there's something exceptional about us that separates us from all those "other" countries (there are indeed many good things about us; the same could also be said of Belgium, New Zealand, France, Germany, etc.). We think we're #1 in everything when the truth is our students are 17th in science and 25th in math, and we're 35th in life expectancy. We believe we have the greatest democracy but we have the lowest voting turnout of any western democracy. We're biggest and the bestest at everything and we demand and take what we want.

And sometimes we have to be violent m*****f*****s to get it. But if one of us goes off-message and shows the utterly psychotic nature and brutal results of violence in a Newtown or an Aurora or a Virginia Tech, then we get all "sad" and "our hearts go out to the families" and presidents promise to take "meaningful action." Well, maybe this president means it this time. He'd better. An angry mob of millions is not going to let this drop.

While we are discussing and demanding what to do, may I respectfully ask that we stop and take a look at what I believe are the three extenuating factors that may answer the question of why we Americans have more violence than most anyone else:

1. POVERTY. If there's one thing that separates us from the rest of the developed world, it's this. 50 million of our people live in poverty. One in five Americans goes hungry at some point during the year. The majority of those who aren't poor are living from paycheck to paycheck. There's no doubt this creates more crime. Middle class jobs prevent crime and violence. (If you don't believe that, ask yourself this: If your neighbor has a job and is making \$50,000/year, what are the chances he's going to break into your home, shoot you and take your TV? Nil.)

2. FEAR/RACISM. We're an awfully fearful country considering that, unlike most nations, we've never been invaded. (No, 1812 wasn't an invasion. We started it.) Why on earth would we need 300 million guns in our homes? I get why the Russians might be a little spooked (over 20 million of them died in World War II). But what's our excuse? Worried that the Indians from the casino may go on the warpath? Concerned that the Canadians seem to be amassing too many Tim Horton's donut shops on both sides of the border?

No. It's because too many white people are afraid of black people. Period. The vast majority of the guns in the U.S. are sold to white people who live in the suburbs or the country. When we fantasize about being mugged or home invaded, what's the image of the perpetrator in our heads? Is it the freckled-face kid from down the street -- or is it someone who is, if not black, at least poor?

I think it would be worth it to a) do our best to eradicate poverty and re-create the middle class we used to have, and b) stop promoting the image of the black man as the boogeyman out to hurt you. Calm down, white people, and put away your guns.

3. THE "ME" SOCIETY. I think it's the every-man-for-himself ethos of this country that has put us in this mess and I believe it's been our undoing. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps! You're not my problem! This is mine!

Clearly, we are no longer our brother's and sister's keeper. You get sick and can't afford the operation? Not my problem. The bank has foreclosed on your home? Not my problem. Can't afford to go to college? Not my problem.

And yet, it all sooner or later becomes our problem, doesn't it? Take away too many safety nets and everyone starts to feel the impact. Do you want to live in that kind of society, one where you will then have a legitimate reason to be in fear? I don't.

I'm not saying it's perfect anywhere else, but I have noticed, in my travels, that other civilized countries see a national benefit to taking care of each other. Free medical care, free or low-cost college, mental health help. And I wonder -- why can't *we* do that? I think it's because in many other countries people see each other not as separate and alone but rather together, on the path of life, with each person existing as an integral part of the whole. And you help them when they're in need, not punish them because they've had some misfortune or bad break. I have to believe

one of the reasons gun murders in other countries are so rare is because there's less of the lone wolf mentality amongst their citizens. Most are raised with a sense of connection, if not outright solidarity. And that makes it harder to kill one another.

Well, there's some food for thought as we head home for the holidays. Don't forget to say hi to your conservative brother-in-law for me. Even he will tell you that, if you can't nail a deer in three shots -- and claim you need a clip of 30 rounds -- you're not a hunter my friend, and you have no business owning a gun.

Have a wonderful Christmas or a beautiful December 25th!
