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Mr. President, Chicago's Gun Victims Need You Now

By [Tom Bevan](#) - January 18, 2013



Mr. President, please come to Chicago.

In Washington on Wednesday, as you rolled out a slate of gun control measures quickly cobbled together in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre, you said, “If there is even one thing we can do to reduce this violence, if there is even one life that can be saved, then we've got an obligation to try.”

If you believe those words, Mr. President, here is a heartfelt suggestion: Come back to your adopted hometown and personally host a summit that grapples seriously with the causes of -- and crafts meaningful solutions to -- gang violence in America's big cities.

It's really not much of an exaggeration to say that parts of Chicago resemble a war zone. The numbers are grim. Unofficially, there were [513 homicides](#) in Chicago in 2012, nearly 100 more than New York City, which recorded 414 killings but which has a population three times larger. Chicago's body count is 200 more than the number of U.S. troops killed in Afghanistan last year. The carnage has continued unabated into the New Year.

It's gone on too long, sir.

The sad reality is that while terrible mass shootings like the ones at Aurora and Newtown shock the nation's

conscience, pull at the public's heartstrings, and garner wall-to-wall media coverage, they represent a tiny fraction of the number of gun homicides in the country every year.

Consider this, Mr. President: During the first 16 days of January, 26 people have been killed by guns in Chicago -- the exact same number as at Sandy Hook Elementary School. By the time this year is out, the south and west sides of the city we both call home will have endured, in terms of sheer numbers of people killed, the equivalent of 20 Sandy Hook massacres. That's on top of the equivalent of the 19 Sandy Hooks the city experienced in 2012.

Yet there has been little outcry by the national media, and not much public attention paid to Chicago's crucible by either national political party. Just the sterile news stories in the local papers every morning recounting the details of yet another young person's life cut short and another family ripped apart thanks to senseless violence.

The other sad reality, Mr. President, is that almost nothing proposed this week in Washington, D.C., by your administration will do anything to stem the tide of gun violence in our inner cities. Most of these crimes were not committed with semi-automatic assault weapons, they weren't committed by the mentally ill, and they won't be stopped by universal background checks.

If you are serious about doing everything in your power to curb gun violence and save lives, then you must harness your immense popularity in Chicago -- and in other big cities -- to address the elephant in the room: the failures of a society grown coarsened, desensitized to violence, and too tolerant of such carnage.

This is true of American culture broadly: Hollywood has become too blithe in its glorification of murder, and makers of ultra-violent video games share some of the blame too. But it's particularly true within the African-American community, where too many fatherless young men have given up hope for a better future and embraced a nihilistic gang culture that not only accepts brutal violence on a daily basis but encourages it.

During your presidency you've been asked a number of times about issues of concern to the black community, such as the high rate of African-American unemployment. You tend to respond, gracefully, and rightly, I believe, that you are president of all Americans, and not just one particular group or another.

This issue is different. Because of your heritage and your stature as the first African-American president, you may be the only person in this country who has the influence and moral standing to speak much needed truths to address this longstanding scourge in the black community.

As you said, "If there is even one thing we can do to reduce this violence, if there is even one life that can be saved, then we've got an obligation to try."

There is one thing you can do, Mr. President. Come home to Chicago. Talk to the kids. If they'll listen to anybody, they'll listen to you.



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