



The politics of murder

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"Today is a day for consoling the survivors, and mourning those we lost. There's a time and place for a political debate." White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, Oct. 2, 2017, one day after Stephen Paddock murdered 58 people in Las Vegas.

"At some point, perhaps that [debate] will come. But that's not for now. That's for — at a later time." President Donald Trump, Oct. 3, 2017

After every mass shooting, the "gun in every hand" folks tell us not to politicize the gun deaths by discussing gun control. We're supposed to wait until some vague future day when things are calmer. But that day never seems to come. Here's a very short list of mass shootings just from 2011 on; after each, we were told it was "too soon" to discuss gun control.

Jared Loughner killed 6 people in a Safeway parking lot in Tucson, Ariz., on Jan. 8, 2011.

James Holmes killed 12 people in a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., on July 20, 2012.

Adam Lanza killed 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., on Dec. 14, 2012.

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Dylan Roof killed 9 people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., on June 17, 2015.

Stephen Paddock killed 58 people at the Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas on Oct. 1, 2017.

Devin Kelley killed 26 people at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, on Nov. 5, 2017.

Robert Bowers killed 11 people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Penn., on Oct. 27, 2018.

This is a tiny sampling of the hundreds of mass shootings we have endured. The common factor in all of these shootings? The perpetrator was a native-born American who used a firearm. But we're not supposed to discuss that.

In contrast, when an undocumented immigrant commits a murder, President Trump immediately politicizes it. In 2018, he invited the parents of two teenage girls murdered by MS-13 gang members to his State of the Union speech. He said, "Open borders...have caused the loss of

many innocent lives." What he failed to mention were the 346 mass shootings that took place in 2017, with hundreds of innocent lives lost. (Washington Post, 2/16/18)

As long as Trump can claim undocumented immigrants are all killers and rapists, he can maintain support for his inhumane immigration policies. He did this recently in the case of Wilbur Martinez-Guzman, the 19-year-old undocumented immigrant arrested for four murders in Gardnerville and Reno, from Jan. 10 to 16.

Martinez-Guzman was arrested on Jan. 19 but not formally charged with murder until Jan. 28. On Jan. 21, Trump tweeted, "Four people in Nevada viciously robbed and killed by an illegal immigrant who should not have been in our Country.... We need a powerful Wall!"

I'm not in any way excusing Martinez-Guzman, who admitted his guilt. I am wondering why his crimes are worse than say, Devin Kelley or Stephen Paddock, who slaughtered a total of 84 people. Is it because Martinez-Guzman is supposed to represent all undocumented immigrants, while mass murderers are considered individually? Could it be because Kelley and Paddock are white? Just wondering.

In reality, any of us are more likely to be killed by a native-born white man than by an undocumented immigrant. The libertarian Cato Institute published a 2018 report that said "in Texas the murder arrest rate for native-born Americans was 'about 46 percent higher than the illegal immigrant homicide rate.'" Other studies confirm this finding. (CBS News, 2/4/19)

During the 2019 State of the Union speech, Trump introduced family members of the murdered Reno couple. Apparently thoughts and prayers were insufficient. He then lied about the number of people murdered by undocumented immigrants. He didn't even mention the number of people murdered every year by native-born Americans with guns, since that doesn't fit his fear-mongering agenda.

After the Las Vegas shooting, Trump said the gun debate was "for... a later time." To give Trump credit, he said he would ban bump stocks, which he did on Dec. 18. That's good. Sadly, after Martinez-Guzman was arrested but not yet charged with murder, Trump was already tweeting his guilt. That's not good.

On Feb. 7, Trump said, "Every life is sacred." If he believed that, he would be just as concerned about those murdered by native-born white men with guns as those murdered by undocumented immigrants. Instead, Trump seems uninterested in solving the gun violence epidemic, which kills nearly 40,000 Americans every year. Are those lives less sacred? Why?