

The Grin of a Fool: Gun Control and the NRA  
By: Rosemary and Walter Brasch  
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A white racist with strong sympathies for the Confederacy and segregation walks into a black church in Charleston, S.C., talks with a welcoming congregation for about an hour, and then murders nine of them. The response by the nation is to discuss the Confederate battle flag, and why it should be removed from society.

An undocumented citizen who was deported five times gets a stolen handgun from a federal officer and murders a 32-year-old woman, who he did not know, in San Francisco. The response is to discuss immigration laws and practices.

In Chicago over the Fourth of July weekend, seven people were murdered, and 41 injured in 34 shooting incidents. In Baltimore, two unidentified men killed three people in a residential area near the University of Maryland; a fourth gunshot victim survived. In the first half of the year, there were 154 murders in Baltimore. In Allentown and Easton, Pa., three people were murdered; police believe the suspect, now in custody, may also have attempted to kill someone in New Jersey the week before. The response by the public is to escalate the discussion about gang violence.

Racism. Immigration. Gang violence.

What's missing in the discussion—the most obvious issue, the common thread—**is the use of guns.**

Hate and fear supply the ammunition; people with guns carry out the execution of peace. President Obama, in addressing the nation shortly after the murders at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church, alluded to the issue of guns. In a subsequent interview with radio host/comedian Marc Maron, he was more specific—“The grip of the NRA on Congress is extremely strong. I don't foresee any legislative action being taken in this Congress.” The president also explained why there is almost no movement on responsible gun control legislation is because manufacturers—who donate millions to the NRA—“make out like bandits, partly because of this fear that's churned up that the federal government and the black helicopters are all coming to get your guns.”

Conservatives attacked the President's comments; liberals proved the president's points by their cowardly silence.

The Democratic leadership and members of Congress could have said there is a high correlation between the amount of money the NRA pays to legislators and the stranglehold on allowing responsible gun ownership laws to emerge. But they didn't.

They could have said the NRA leadership and a minority of its members, paranoid and waving conspiracy theories as if they were confederate battle flags, have their hands firmly around the testicles of the law makers. But they didn't.

They could have said that in Mr. Obama's six years as president, not once did he or the government ever say the government should confiscate guns, but wanted sensible regulation at a level even less than required to get a driver's license. But they didn't say that, either.

If the Democratic leadership and elected legislators didn't wish to attack the stranglehold of the NRA, they could just have cited facts.

They could have said that 91 percent of all Americans believe there should be at least some restrictions, including mandatory gun locks to help prevent at least 1,500 injuries to children each year. But they didn't.

They could have spoken out about the necessity for background checks for all gun sales, including private sales at gun shows. But they didn't.

They could have said that the United States, with civilians owning about 30 percent of all handguns in the world, has the world's highest civilian rate of ownership of guns. But they didn't.

They could have said that only two countries in the world—the United States and Yemen, home to a major branch of al-Qaeda—see gun ownership as a basic right, and almost every other country sees ownership as a privilege. They could have said that, but they didn't.

They could have said that over 100,000 people are shot every year in the United States; the rate is higher than almost every other country in the world, including several countries where there is active terrorism.

They could have stated there are numerous research studies that show a high correlation between gun ownership and both suicides and homicides. But they didn't.

They could have flooded the media with outrage after the Republican-controlled House Appropriations Committee, days after the Charleston murders, continued the ban against the Centers for Disease Control to conduct scientific research about gun violence. But they didn't.

They could have talked about the ease in acquiring guns, the kind that killed 12 people and wounded 58 others at a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., and killed 26 at a school in Newtown, Conn. But they didn't.

They could have directly attacked the argument that the Second Amendment gives everyone the right to own guns, without restriction. They could have cited *U.S. v. Miller* that permits states and the federal government to ban certain guns. But they didn't.

They could have cited court decisions that every one of the Bill of Rights has exceptions, but the NRA erroneously claims the Second Amendment is absolute.

They could have cited other Supreme Court cases that give Congress the authority to place restrictions on gun ownership. But they didn't.

They could have discussed the principle of use of deadly force in "stand your ground" laws against the "obligation to retreat" when possible. But they didn't.

They could have discussed recent legislation in Maine, happily signed by the governor, which permits anyone to carry a hidden handgun without having to get a permit or take any training in the use of firearms. The NRA leadership and lobbyists are ecstatic about that law. Perhaps, as Maine's murder and accidental shooting rate rises, they will lose the grin of a fool.