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America's Gun and Guard Culture *Nation of Fear*

by JESSE JACKSON

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America's gun culture costs lives and feeds our fears. Consider the most recent injustice in Florida, the verdict in the Michael Dunn case, and the most recent news about America's "guard labor."

In Jacksonville, Fla., Michael Dunn, a 47-year-old white man, was aggravated by the loud rap music coming from an SUV filled with four black teenagers in a convenience store parking lot. An exchange of insults ensued. Dunn, who was armed and clearly dangerous, claimed that he was threatened by Jordan Davis, a 17-year-old high school senior, and later claimed he saw the barrel of a shotgun coming from the SUV. There was no shotgun; no other witness saw anything that might resemble a shotgun. Dunn opened his door and fired 10 shots into the SUV as it drove away, killing Jordan Davis. Dunn then drove away without calling the cops, and without ever mentioning that the boys had a shotgun.

Under Florida's inane "Stand Your Ground" law, however, Dunn had the right to use lethal force to defend himself if he "reasonably" thought his life was threatened. Dunn's lawyer said, "I don't have to prove the threat, just that Mike Dunn believed it." The Jacksonville jury found Dunn guilty of three counts of "attempted murder" in his strafing of the car, but they couldn't come to a decision on his murder of Jordan Davis. In Florida, it is increasingly dangerous to be young, black and male.

In the New York Times on Monday, Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev report in "One Nation Under Guard" that the U.S. now employs more private security guards than high school teachers. Tallying up all of what they call "guard labor," including police officers, prison guards, soldiers, etc., they come to a figure of 5.2 million, more than all teachers at all levels. The "guard labor" share of the labor force in America has risen dramatically since the 1970s, as inequality has reached new extremes.

Bowles and Jayadev find that guard labor and inequality are connected. We have four times as much guard labor as Sweden, a country of equal living standards but far less inequality. States with extreme inequality like New York and Louisiana have far more of their work force employed in guard labor than states with less inequality like Idaho and New Hampshire. Bowles and Jayadev discount race as a factor, but obviously Sweden, New Hampshire and Idaho are also far less diverse than the U.S., New York and Louisiana, respectively. Bowles and Jayadev note that social spending seems to decline as guard labor grows. The U.S. is spending more of its money on guards and less on opportunity.

One haunting feature of South Africa under apartheid was the extent to which the homes of the affluent whites were protected by walls, barbed wire and private guards. Fear of crime and of majority revolt pervaded the country.

Our gun and guard culture is, at root, also about fear. We pride ourselves on being the home of the brave and land of the free. But increasingly we are the home of the fearful, and land of the armed. Michael Dunn's murderous rage was grounded in fear. Our soaring guard labor reflects rising fear. As Jacksonville demonstrated once more, guns can make those fears deadly.

We would be far better off investing in opportunity rather than fear, making the country less unequal and more confident in its diversity. Contrary to the NRA, spreading concealed weapons around makes our streets more, not less, dangerous. Contrary to real estate agents, gated communities and armed guards offer more provocation than protection. In the end, real security comes not from guards or guns, but from justice.

