

Fiorito: Stopping gang violence could start in daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

This bears repeating.

But first, let me recap: Monday's column, about the killer who let loose with a gun in the Eaton Centre, ending one life and harming far too many others, prompted some peculiar mail.

Some of it came from racists. Some of it came from the law and order crowd. And some of it came from civil libertarians.

Last things first:

I wrote that I didn't think there would be any protest if the killer showed up in court, after capture, with broken bones and bruises. Some people, in the heat of the moment, took that as an endorsement of police brutality.

Of course I do not endorse police brutality, and anybody who reads this column on a regular basis ought to know that; the observation that there might be rough treatment of a captured thug, followed by a quiet turning of the page, is a far cry from endorsement.

Now to the law and order types, who would jettison due process; many of these types wrote to describe the acute forms of punishment the brute shooter ought to get. Let me point out something that ought to be obvious, even to the dimmest:

If punishment worked as a deterrent to crime, we'd have stopped crime back when we were beheading people. As for due process, it exists to protect me and you and we would all be at risk without it.

And then there were all those frogs and toads who wrote, as they are wont to do, with hate-stained ink, as if this random act was proof of their ignorant, anti-immigrant, race-based theories. Race had nothing to do with this.

And all of us were hurt, including the fellow I talked to near the Eaton Centre — handsome, well-spoken, holding down two jobs, living downtown, dressed in loose jeans, a varsity jacket and a backwards ball cap; but, because he was young and black and downtown on the morning after, he was either avoided or stared at by the crowd, and at one point had to endure the sneering questions of the cops.

When he hurts, I hurt.

A side note: this seems to have been an internal gang matter. Note to gang leader: this thing ought not to have been left to fester. I'm also betting that the gang washed its hands of the shooter, which is why he turned himself in so quickly.

Now to the beginning, and what bears repeating: The way to cut gang crime in Toronto is to build daycares in every grade school in the city.

Why?

Because a kid in daycare is likely to get what he or she may not get at home: care, attention, good role models, and the chance to learn to get along with others.

And if daycare workers notice behavioural or learning problems in a child, they can tip the kid's schoolteachers, who will get a head start on bringing resources, enrichment and attention to bear.

Why?

Because a kid who has trouble learning, or trouble getting along with others, will always be at a disadvantage; kids who are at a disadvantage tend to earn less, just as they tend to be angrier; kids who can't get along, and who don't get the chance to earn, are more likely to take shortcuts in order to get the rewards society has to offer; gangs are the easiest shortcut.

So, let's have daycare.

Is that a direct line? Nope. Is it hard to follow? Yep. Do we fund our grade schools now so that kids can get extra help? Not so much. Would we save money later if we spent more money now? Yep.

Should we?

Duh.

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