

Mass Shootings: Fallout From a Culture Where Anything Goes and Nothing Matters

My editor at *Intellectual Takeout*, Annie Holmquist, wrote to me the Monday after back-to-back mass shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio to ask if I might write a column about these horrific murders. She and some of the staff were discussing the shootings and found themselves asking the following questions:

- Why are young AMERICAN men between 18-24 doing these things?
- Does politics have anything to do with it?
- This is not happening in Western Europe. Is the difference gun control? Or are young American men more atomized and desperate?
- Can we talk about sin, total depravity, and evil in the human heart? Or can we solve this with new laws?

Let's start with the easy questions.

As I write, the Justice Department may declare mass shootings a capital crime. But I can't conceive of solving these shootings with new laws. Let's ask ourselves: Would a young man who bursts into WalMart and opens fire on strangers be deterred by possible execution? That's not likely. It's also not likely that banning assault-style rifles will end these murders, for the majority of mass shootings [involve handguns](#).

Mass shootings and killings *do* take place in Europe. In fact, they are a worldwide phenomenon. We rarely hear of them because that is the nature of the media. Nor does the United States lead the world in [mass killings](#).

Now we come to the more difficult questions.

Politics has much to do with these murders – not just the politics of the shooters themselves, but those who after each such tragedy call for gun control, blame the NRA or the president or other enemies, and demand new restrictions and laws. Before the dead are in their graves, we hear a chorus of voices raised against guns. Here I am curious: Where are these people when the inner city inhabitants of cities like Chicago and Baltimore [weekly bleed and die](#)? The weekend of the El Paso and Dayton shootings saw seven dead and over 50 wounded [in Chicago](#). In less than 24 hours, on a “Ceasefire Weekend” in which Baltimore authorities called for peace on the streets, [seven people](#) were shot, one fatally.

Why are young American men between 18-24 doing these things?

My sister, who was a Clinton supporter, despises guns, but blames these shootings on society’s failure to treat the mentally ill. I agree in part, but even more so with the thoughts of my friend John, who owns guns, is an expert on their use, and frequents a firing range. John would tell you that we have spent the last fifty years tearing up our culture and traditions. He would tell you that the young mass shooters, most of whom are white, have spent years playing violent video games, watching violent movies, and being denigrated because of their race and their sex. John pointed me to an essay, “[Hold the Teddy Bears and Candles](#),” which opens with this paragraph:

In a nation afflicted by fads, crazes, manias, and rages, mass murder is the jackpot for nihilists – begging the question: why does this country produce so many of them? Answer: this is exactly what you get in a culture where anything goes and nothing matters. Extract all the meaning and purpose from being here on earth, and erase as many boundaries as you can from custom and behavior, and watch what happens, especially among young men trained on video slaughter games.

A culture where anything goes and nothing matters.

That pretty much nails it.

The *Intellectual Takeout* staff brought up “sin, total depravity, and evil in the human heart.” In the wake of a mass shooting, most of us surely think it an evil act. We condemn it and wonder why someone would commit such bloodshed, gunning down strangers. But in this very question about sin and evil, we have part of an answer as to that “why.” If we believe, to paraphrase Solzhenitsyn, that “the battle line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man,” then we realize that in these mass murderers evil won out.

If we could see into the hearts of these young men, I think we would be sickened by our investigation: isolation from others, a hatred created and egged on by certain online sites, a contempt for human beings in general, a dark swamp of despair, a deep sense of failure, a bitterness beyond belief, an emptiness vaster than the Sahara. Had they not done murder, we might be moved to pity for the souls living in such a hell.

I have no preventative to mass shootings, no solution to make them disappear. No one does. Human beings are too complex, too varied in nature, to apply some universal healing salve.

But I do know that as we become a more godless people, a people entranced by violence in our electronic games and movies, as we cheapen human life, as we continue to demonize our enemies or see people as digits and statistics instead of as creatures of flesh and blood, as we continue to isolate ourselves from others and so become “more atomized and desperate,” the mass shootings and the murders on the streets of our cities will continue.

As my friend John says, what’s remarkable is that it doesn’t happen more often.

A bleak conclusion. But all I have.

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