

# Six-year-old Michigan girl shot and killed in classroom

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A six-year-old girl was shot and killed, apparently by a fellow first grade student, a six-year-old boy, in a classroom at Buell Elementary School in Mt. Morris Township, outside of Flint, Michigan. Flint is a center of General Motors' auto production empire, located sixty miles north of Detroit. The fatal shooting occurred Tuesday morning.

Whether the shooting was intentional or accidental is not known for certain. There are reports that the two children had a quarrel prior to the incident. Authorities identified the weapon as a .32 caliber handgun stolen in December.

According to one account, the shooting took place around 10 AM as students were filing out of a classroom. Allegedly, the boy pulled out the gun and fired one shot at the girl, hitting her in the neck. The boy reportedly then ran into a lavatory where he hid the gun in a trash can.

The girl, Kayla Rolland, was taken to Hurley Medical Center. She died at approximately 10:30 AM. School officials held the boy until police arrived. He is currently in the custody of the state child welfare agency, the so-called Family Independence Agency.

No sooner had the first news reports of the tragic incident emerged than the question was posed as to whether Genesee County authorities might prosecute the alleged "gunman." As absurd as this might seem, there was good reason for the issue to be raised.

The shooting follows by a few months the conviction in nearby Pontiac of Nathaniel Abraham, who was only 11 at the time of his alleged crime. Abraham was the first youth to be charged with murder under a 1997 Michigan statute that allows children of *any age* to be prosecuted as adults for serious crimes. Oakland county authorities pursued the case against Abraham in order to establish a precedent and legitimize the 1997 law.

These officials and the Michigan state legislators who framed the law have, in essence, attempted to efface any legal or moral distinction between children and adults. According to this line of reasoning, human beings reach the "age of reason" in elementary school. Supporters of the law have made clear they would be prepared to prosecute children of kindergarten or first-grade age.

The first response of Genesee County Prosecutor Arthur A. Busch was to downplay the likelihood of bringing charges against the boy. "There is a presumption in law that a child ... is not criminally responsible and can't form an intent to kill," Busch told reporters. "Obviously, he has done a very terrible thing, but legally, he can't be held criminally responsible."

Whether Busch is more enlightened than Oakland County officials or has simply been chastened by the unfavorable publicity the Abraham case attracted is not clear. Nor can it be ruled out that he might come under pressure to change his mind. Nonetheless, it is telling that every television and print journalist felt obliged to discuss the possibility of charges being laid. That in itself reveals the barbaric state of the American justice system.

Whether the little boy is prosecuted or not, it is safe to assume that the authorities will turn the tragic death of Kayla Rolland into a pure police matter. Busch suggested that the individual responsible for allowing the gun to fall into the boy's hands might face charges.

Bill Clinton, fundraising in Florida, deplored the incident and noted, as he had in his State of the Union address, that the "accidental gun death rate of children in America is nine times higher than that in the other 25 biggest countries combined." In the same speech Clinton sounded a familiar theme, insisting that Americans had never had it so good. "What are we to

do with this enormous amount of prosperity...?” he asked.

These comments ignore an obvious point: if the population were universally enjoying prosperity and happiness, such incidents as the Mt. Morris shooting would either not occur, or they would merely be isolated episodes.

In fact, this latest tragedy is the most recent in a series of school shootings in the US. Since the mass killings at Columbine High School in Colorado last May, in which 14 students (including the two teenage gunmen) and a teacher were killed, there have been numerous other incidents: on May 20, 1999, a 15-year-old boy opened fire at a high school in Conyers, Ga., wounding six students; on November 19, a 13-year-old girl was fatally shot in the head in a school in Deming, New Mexico, allegedly killed by a 12-year-old boy; on December 6, a 13-year-old student fired at least 15 rounds at a middle school in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, wounding four classmates.

The epidemic of shootings cannot simply be ascribed to individual weaknesses. The deep alienation felt by many of the younger generation, the debased social atmosphere in which backwardness and violence breed, the availability of fire-arms in massive numbers—these are symptoms of a crisis of American society for which the ruling elite has no solutions. Its only response is to lock more people up.

Kip Kinkel, the 17-year-old, who opened fire at a high school in Springfield, Oregon, has been sentenced to nearly 112 years in prison; Andrew Wurst, 15, responsible for the death of a teacher in Edinboro, Pennsylvania has been imprisoned for 30 to 60 years; a 14-year-old student pleaded guilty but mentally ill for a shooting in West Paducah, Kentucky and received a life sentence; Evan Ramsey, 16, who shot and killed a school principal and a fellow student in Bethel, Alaska, is serving a 210-year sentence.



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