

# Letter from University of Arizona student on Monday's campus shootings

31 October 2002

Dear *World Socialist Web Site*,

I am writing to call your attention to another outburst of violence here in the United States. You may have heard about the student who killed three instructors and himself at the University of Arizona on Monday. As a UA student (and as someone who lives only a few blocks from the shootings), I feel that I should share with you a "view from the ground," and try to put it in the context of your articles about the Washington sniper.

Though I am reluctant to consider this event politically while the personal grief of students here is still so fresh, the fact that this comes so soon after the Washington sniper shootings, the Oklahoma copycat sniper, etc., makes it seem all the more urgent to analyze what is happening here. It is becoming increasingly clear that David Walsh was right when he wrote about the Washington sniper that "this is principally a social, not an individual, phenomenon."

The shooter at the UA Nursing College also had a biography that sounds similar in many ways to that of the man accused in the Washington sniper shootings.

The UA shooter, Robert Flores, was also a Gulf War veteran (he also received sniper training in the military). He had also gone through a painful divorce and had other personal problems in his life, yet had done nothing to suggest that he was capable of the cold and calculated killings he carried out on Monday. He was outwardly an ordinary and even nice person, at least according to his neighbors (though he had previous problems at the university).

More facts about this shooting will certainly come to light soon, but the rough similarity of this case with many others before it is already very clear.

And I think that school shootings like this one are particularly revealing of what David Walsh called "the undercurrent of rage in American society."

When a prisoner shoots a prison warden, or a battered wife shoots her husband, we immediately understand these acts as natural symptoms of life-or-death struggles. But why do people kill at high schools and universities, where no similar coercion is happening?

It seems to me that it can only be explained by a conjunction of the American cult of violence (which you correctly point out as correlated with the increasingly reckless foreign policy of the United States) with the extreme disempowerment and alienation that characterize this modern spectacle-commodity society.

Today students and faculty, everyone connected to the UA, is shocked and grieving. Meanwhile, the Bush administration is plotting another war against Iraq, which predictably will culminate not only in the slaughter of thousands of Iraqi civilians, but also deaths closer to home, horrors like Monday's tragedy, committed ten years from now by the veterans of another imperialist war of plunder. Unfortunately, that bleak assessment is the way things look from here right now; but I think people are also beginning to become aware that another world without this sick violence really is possible.

Yours sincerely,

JK



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