# Three more mass shootings in the US

**David Walsh**
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In the latest social atrocities in the US, three lone gunmen killed more than 20 people Friday and Saturday.

On Friday, in Binghamton, New York, a Vietnamese immigrant shot 13 people to death at an immigration center before turning a weapon on himself. A 22-year-old white supremacist ambushed Pittsburgh police Saturday morning, killing three of them. A Washington state man apparently murdered five of his own children on Saturday, then shot himself in his car.

The slayings and suicides took place in the context of two significant social phenomena: growing misery for wide layers of the population, reflected in the jobless figures announced Friday, and a stock market surge, as the financial elite expresses confidence that the Obama administration will do nothing to impinge on its wealth. While the eruption of personal violence has innumerable immediate causes, the strains created by the economic crisis undoubtedly play a role.

In the Binghamton massacre, according to the authorities, 41-year-old Jiverly Wong, a Vietnamese immigrant, after blocking its back door exit with his vehicle, burst into the American Civic Association—an immigrant aid organization—and opened fire on employees and students. Wong, who wore a bullet-proof vest and fired two handguns, killed 13 before committing suicide. The episode is the worst in the US since the Virginia Tech mass killings in 2007.

Wong, who came to the US in the early 1990s, had been laid off from a local Shop-Vac factory in the autumn of 2008—where he assembled vacuum cleaners—and was living with his parents on $200-a-week unemployment benefits. He was apparently distraught by his lack of command of the English language, which he felt held him back and made people "look down" on him, and was despondent over his job situation. He had previously worked for IBM, or an IBM spin-off, in nearby Endicott, New York (the birthplace of IBM) and at a sushi delivery company in southern California, where he worked for $9 an hour.

According to the *New York Times*, he was also "a gun enthusiast who often spent weekends shooting targets and trying out different guns at a local sporting goods store. He had been licensed to carry handguns in New York since 1996, the police said."

Hue Huynh, also a Vietnamese immigrant, told the *Times* about an encounter her husband recently had with Wong: "He told my husband, 'I'm very upset I don't have a job. ... He said he tried to find a job but nobody like[d] him." She told the paper that her husband tried to reassure him: "He told him, 'You're still young, you will be okay, you will get a job again.'" "He was a nice boy," Huynh added. "He had bad luck, he went everywhere but [there was] no good job for him."

Wong's victims came from Laos, Somalia, the Philippines, former Soviet republics and China. One of the victims, an Iraqi mother of three in her 50s, the Associated Press noted, "came to the United States after surviving three car bombings in Iraq," according to Imam Kasim Kopuz, a local Islamic leader. "To think that would happen here," Kopuz told the AP.

A BBC reporter noted, "Some people in Binghamton are now asking whether the tough economic times could have pushed him over the edge." A resident, Darlene Trunkowski "speculated that economic pressures could have been a factor. … 'The times are so bad,' she said. 'I think that's why a lot of people are so stressed. People are losing their jobs and they don't know what to do.' 'Is this the solution?' she asked herself. 'No, but it's very sad.'"

Binghamton is a decaying industrial city of 45,000, some 150 miles northwest of New York City. The region was once home to tens of thousands of workers in the shoe industry. IBM has operations in the area, along with a number of defense-related industries. The official jobless rate increased by 61 percent in Binghamton between September 2008 and

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March 2009, to 9 percent, above the national average. Jobs in manufacturing, construction and information have been lost.

In Pittsburgh Saturday morning, Richard Poplawski allegedly opened fire on police when they responded to a domestic disturbance complaint called in by his mother, killing two officers immediately and wounding another, who eventually bled to death.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* noted on Sunday that Poplawski "was a young man convinced the nation was secretly controlled by a cabal that would eradicate freedom of speech, take away his guns and use the military to enslave the citizenry." The newspaper added: "He subscribed to conspiracy theories and, by January 2007, was posting photographs of his tattoos on white supremacist Web site Stormfront."

Poplawski reportedly decided to enlist in the military in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks. However, he was discharged from the military after he allegedly threw a lunch tray at a drill instructor. Back in Pittsburgh, Poplawski attacked his girlfriend in September 2005, prompting a protection-from-abuse order. He also became increasingly drawn to extreme right-wing web sites.

On Saturday, according to press accounts, Poplawski got into a dispute with his mother, who threatened to kick him out and then called the police. When they showed up, Poplawski opened fire. A several hour-long standoff ensued, in which hundreds of rounds were apparently fired.

A friend of the alleged gunman, Edward Perkovic, told the AP that he received a phone call at work from Poplawski "in which he said, 'Eddie, I am going to die today. ... Tell your family I love them and I love you.' Perkovic said: 'I heard gunshots and he hung up. ... He sounded like he was in pain, like he got shot.'" Poplawski, also sporting body armor, survived the gun-battle and faces homicide charges.

Another friend, Joe DiMarco, told the AP that Poplawski had been laid off from his job at a glass factory earlier this year. DiMarco said he didn't know the name of the company, but "knew his friend had been upset about losing his job."

A father, a resident of a mobile home park in rural Washington, allegedly shot his five children to death Saturday and then took his own life in his still-running car about 18 miles away.

James Harrison apparently shot four of the children, ages 7 to 16, in their beds and the other in the trailer's bathroom. Angela Harrison, the mother of the children—identified as Maxine, Samantha, Heather, Jamie and James, four girls and one boy—was not at home at the time of the killings. The shootings occurred in Graham, Washington, about 45 miles south of Seattle.

Harrison, 34, worked as a security guard at a casino and his wife was employed at a local Wal-Mart. The *Tacoma News-Tribune* reported that former neighbors "said the father frequently spoke harshly to his children, admonishing them loudly in public. The children themselves appeared to be cowed by his bluster, they said." While the neighbors indicated "they often heard the man raise his voice to his wife, they never heard her snap back at him." The AP reports that Harrison impregnated his future wife when she was 13, and had been charged with a "minor assault" on one of the children in 2007.

The *Seattle Times* reports that Angela Harrison had not been home for a few days. Harrison took his 16-year-old daughter, according to the newspaper, and confronted his wife at a local convenience store Friday night. She reportedly told him that she had a new boyfriend and she was not coming home.

Harrison, obviously distraught, drove back to the trailer park, where relatives came by to calm him down. Police believe that between 1 a.m. and 7 a.m. he shot the children.

Harrison's suicide took place around 8 a.m. Saturday morning, when local children reported that a man in a black SUV had shot himself. Police eventually went to the trailer park and found the murdered children.

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