

Aurora, Colorado tragedy: The latest mass shooting in the US

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In the latest episode of the unfolding American nightmare, a 24-year-old man allegedly walked into a crowded premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora, Colorado just after midnight early Friday and opened fire, killing at least 12 people and wounding 59. Among the dead and wounded were young children.

From the US president and governor of Colorado—both Democrats—on down, the official effort at damage control began at once. The tragedy, the public is told, is “senseless” and “inexplicable”—in any case, it has nothing to do with the state of American society.

Thirteen years after the Columbine High School killings, which occurred only 30 miles from Friday’s atrocity (see, “The Columbine High School massacre: American Pastoral ... American Berserk”), and after countless other mass shootings in the intervening years, including the massacre at Virginia Tech in 2007 and the attempted assassination of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in 2011, the establishment’s arguments are not merely banal and superficial, they reek of bad faith.

Police have identified the movie theater shooter as James Eagan Holmes, originally from San Diego, California. In 2011 Holmes enrolled as a graduate student in the neuroscience program at the University of Colorado Medical School campus in Aurora, in suburban Denver, but was in the process of withdrawing from the school.

Shaken, horrified witnesses told reporters that, 20 or 30 minutes into the third part of Christopher Nolan’s *Batman* trilogy, the gunman entered the showing at the Century 16 Movie Theaters at the Aurora Town Center through an emergency exit near the front. He reportedly set off smoke bombs and began firing at audience members.

Witnesses told a local television station, “He looked

so calm when he did it ... He waited for both the bombs to explode before he did anything. Then, after both of them exploded, he began to shoot. ... He had no specific target. He just started letting loose.” The shooter apparently never said a word during the attack.

Survivors offered terrifying accounts of gunshots, screams and bullet-ridden bodies in a smoke-filled room. Wounded and blood-covered moviegoers fled the movie theater in panic. Ten people died at the scene. Others remain in critical condition in local hospitals.

Dressed in an all-black outfit and wearing body armor and a gas mask, Holmes was armed, say authorities, with an AR-15 assault rifle, a shotgun and a .40-caliber handgun. Another weapon was found in his car, to which he retreated after the attack and where he was detained by police, without a struggle.

According to police, the alleged gunman then informed them that his apartment was heavily booby-trapped. Authorities evacuated the building, home exclusively to students, faculty and staff from the medical campus, and four other surrounding ones. With a camera on the end of a 12-foot pole, they explored the unit. The results were “alarming,” as agents discovered “buckets of extra ammunition” and flammable and explosive material.

Holmes’ family lives in Rancho Peñasquitos, a community in northeastern San Diego. He graduated from the city’s Westview High School in 2006, and moved on to the University of California, Riverside, 100 miles north of San Diego. He received a bachelor’s degree in neuroscience in 2010. A fellow student told NBC that Holmes completed the honors program and belonged to the Phi Beta Kappa and Golden Key honor societies at Riverside.

“I always thought that he was a little strange. I could never put my finger on it, but something told me to not

get too close to him ... He was a very smart guy though. He was a little bit of a weird guy, but we were honors students, so weird people were kind of common," the female student told NBC.

According to a former neighbor in San Diego, Tom Mai, a retired electrical engineer, Holmes could not find work after graduating from UC Riverside two years ago. Mai remembered Holmes as a "shy, well-mannered young man," according to the *Los Angeles Times*, "heavily involved in their local Presbyterian church."

Aurora is Colorado's third-largest city with a population of some 325,000. The biggest employer is the Buckley Air Force Base. According to its official site, Buckley "defends America through its air operations, space-based missile warning capabilities, space surveillance operations, space communications operations and support functions."

Along with the University of Colorado Hospital, its Anschutz Medical Campus and the Children's Hospital, other major employers in the city include ADT Security Services and defense-related giants Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin.

Aurora has many Latino residents, who make up some 29 percent of the population, and Holmes lived in a predominantly Latino neighborhood.

The immediate motive for the act of mass murder is not known. However, the anti-social character of the crime, its extraordinary misanthropy, stands out. The gunman chose to attack an opening night screening of a much-anticipated film, at which he could count on finding many residents of Aurora and the surrounding area, in search of relaxation and entertainment. Many were decked out in Batman costumes and the like. Horribly, when the gunman first appeared, a number of audience members thought his presence had something to do with the movie.

No attempt is made, or can be made, by official circles to explain or plumb the depths of such social bitterness and pent-up anger. The results would be too damning for those making the study.

President Barack Obama's public comments in regard to the Aurora shooting were as empty as those issued by Bill Clinton and George W. Bush in similar circumstances, but managed to exceed those of his predecessors in their cynicism and self-promotion.

Obama told the crowd that, "the federal government

stands ready to do whatever is necessary to bring whoever is responsible for this heinous crime to justice. (Applause.) And we will take every step possible to ensure the safety of all of our people."

This is demonstrably false. By its plundering of resources and military aggression overseas and its social destructiveness at home, the US ruling elite, with Obama at its helm, has made life immeasurably *less safe* for the American population.

Obama continued, waxing philosophical, "We may never understand what leads anybody to terrorize their fellow human beings like this. Such violence, such evil is senseless. It's beyond reason." This from the man who helps draw up a weekly "kill list" of those targeted for assassination in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere.

It is too early to attempt to explain Holmes' action. Many more facts will emerge. This much can be said with certainty. Since the Columbine massacre, social life in America has sharply deteriorated and social tensions have only increased. Past tragedies, including the Columbine, Virginia Tech and Giffords shootings have gone unexplained and unaccounted for, and the Aurora tragedy will be no different.



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