

Shooting rampage in Santa Barbara, California leaves 7 dead

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At least seven people were killed Friday night and many more injured after a young man first stabbed three of his roommates to death and then fatally shot three more people in Isla Vista, a beachside community near University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), before apparently turning the gun on himself.

The alleged shooter has been identified as Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old student and the son of film personality Peter Rodger, an assistant director on *The Hunger Games*.

Elliot posted videos of himself on YouTube describing his personal frustrations with the opposite sex and warned how he would wage a “war on women” in a 140-page “manifesto” posted online.

His parents had alerted police weeks before about his YouTube videos, in which he discussed suicide and killing other people. Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown told the media that police were sent to Rodger’s apartment April 30 for a “wellness check” and reported that the young man appeared to be “shy” and “polite” and claimed he was simply having difficulty with student life.

In his manifesto, Rodger described how he told police that his online videos were merely a misunderstanding before adding, “If they had demanded to search my room [and presumably found his weapons and ammunition] ... That would have ended everything. For a few horrible seconds I thought it was all over.”

The manifesto also described how he intended to carry out his rampage in April, before delaying it due to illness.

Rodger, after allegedly murdering his three housemates on Friday, then targeted a sorority house but was denied entry and, according to eyewitnesses, began shooting at girls outside, killing two of them.

Rodger then allegedly went to a nearby delicatessen

and shot another young man dead, and then proceeded to fire at more people from his speeding BMW. By this time, police were responding to what they believed were multiple shootings. They engaged Rodger and wounded him in two separate incidents, before he crashed his car and died from what was reportedly a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

In total, thirteen people were wounded, eight of whom had gunshot wounds. Four others were hit by Rodger’s car. Although not all of the victims’ names have been released, it seems to be the case that all were young people in their twenties. Police found three semi-automatic handguns in Rodger’s vehicle and 400 rounds of unspent ammunition. The weapons and ammunition were all legally purchased, since the youth had no official history of mental illness or record of trouble with the authorities.

School authorities and government officials issued perfunctory and obtuse comments about the tragedy. “This is almost the kind of event that’s impossible to prevent and almost impossible to predict,” University of California president Janet Napolitano, former Secretary of Homeland Security, told reporters.

Gov. Jerry Brown told the media he was saddened to learn of this “senseless tragedy,” the same phrase UCSB chancellor Henry T. Yang used to describe Friday night’s shootings. Not to be outdone, President Barack Obama released a statement Sunday saying, “The President and First Lady’s thoughts and prayers go out to the families and friends who lost a loved one as a result of the horrific shooting.”

In the coming days and weeks, the media will obscure the social context in which such massacres take place, as they have done following every previous tragedy. Depending on the “liberal” or “conservative” viewpoint of the given media outfit or pundit, the

public will be told that the only antidote to such “inexplicable” crimes is more gun control, the beefing up of mental health services, the strengthening of police powers, etc. The political and media establishment will then forget about what happened in Santa Barbara before reacting to the next of act of anti-social violence in America with the same combination of cynicism and ignorance.

The question remains, however: if such acts are truly “senseless” and “inexplicable,” then why do so many of them occur, on almost a monthly or weekly basis, in the United States?

If one looks at Rodger’s last video it is clear we are dealing with a very troubled young man seriously in need of professional help, but his comments, as disoriented and disturbed as they are, do not take place in a vacuum.

Rodger ranted against “alpha males” and women who supposedly ignored and mistreated him, despite his good looks. One gets the picture of someone with substantial financial resources, but starved of anything culturally or spiritually nourishing.

The emphasis in American culture is on how much money and status one has. The alleged Santa Barbara shooter apparently swallowed this propaganda and felt devastated that he was not enjoying the personal relations befitting his position.

Here is an excerpt from Rodger’s manifesto: “To make me feel more confident, my mother provided me with a better car to drive in Santa Barbara, a BMW 3 series Coupe. I had always wanted this, since I cared a lot about my appearance. I had been asking my parents for a more upper-class car ever since I found out that there was a car hierarchy, and that some students at my college drove better cars than others. Now I was one of the students with a better, high-class car.”

What has his generation known? Those born in the early 1990s have grown up at a time when the United States has been continuously at war with various peoples around the world. Rodger, a fan of video games, came of age during the “war of terror,” in the era of “kill lists” and drone strikes. At home, women, the mentally ill and immigrants are executed by crueler and crueler means.

Callousness and selfishness have been made into virtues by official America--and by much of the popular culture, to which he was obviously exposed.

Very few people, fortunately, commit such terrible crimes (although the number in the US is remarkable and frightening), but the unbearable pressures and tensions guarantee they will occur. Everyone knows it’s just a matter of time until the next tragedy.

In a tragic irony, Elliot Rodger’s late grandfather, George Rodger (1908-1995), photographed concentration camps when they were first liberated in 1945. He was later a founding member of Magnum Photos, along with Henri Cartier-Bresson (the left-wing French photographer).

The Magnum Photos website explains, “Having covered the liberation of France, Belgium and Holland, Rodger was the first photographer to enter Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in April 1945. In May he photographed the German surrender at Lüneburg for *Time* and *Life*. Traumatized by the experience of looking for ‘nice compositions’ in front of the dead, Rodger embarked on a 28,000-mile journey all over Africa and the Middle East, focusing on animal life, rituals, and ways of life that exist in a close relationship with nature.” Africa became his preoccupation for the next thirty years.

In the experience of the grandfather and the alleged crime of the grandson there is not simply an agonizing personal tragedy, but perhaps some indication as well of the cultural and moral degeneration that has taken place.

The Santa Barbara episode was not the only mass shooting that occurred in the US over the weekend. Three people were killed in front of a hotel in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina when a fight broke out along a boardwalk crowded with tourists.



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