

The Parkland massacre and the dysfunction of American society

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Wednesday's school massacre in Parkland, Florida took the lives of 17 people. Fourteen were students, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years old: Alyssa Alhadeff, Martin Duque, Nicholas Dworet, Jaime Guttenberg, Luke Hoyer, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Joaquin Oliver, Alaina Petty, Meadow Pollack, Helena Ramsay, Alex Schachter, Carmen Schentrup, and Peter Wang. Three were coaches: Chris Hixon, Aaron Feis, and Scott Beigel, who was also a biology teacher.

There are many aspects of this horrific act of mass murder that will require extensive investigation, from the alleged connection of the shooter Nikolas Cruz with a white supremacist group, to the fact that he had posted on social media the aspiration to become a "professional school shooter," a declaration that was subsequently reported to the FBI months before Cruz came to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School armed with an AR-15 rifle.

The initial details about Cruz indicate that he has experienced from his youngest years a series of traumatic events. Adopted as an infant, Cruz lost his adoptive father early on, and then, last November 1, his adoptive mother, a casualty of the flu epidemic. He was clearly disturbed throughout his high school years, exhibiting tendencies toward violent behavior that culminated in his expulsion from Douglas High School about a year ago.

The nature and extent of his psychological disorders remain to be determined. As more information becomes available, the particular traumas that conditioned and triggered his homicidal outburst will be more fully detailed. However, given the fact that the presence of mental illness was certainly visible—to his family, his school, his acquaintances—one must ask why there did not exist social institutions and support systems that

might have intervened to provide Cruz the medical care he needed before this tragedy occurred.

But the fact is that the case of Cruz is hardly unique. The United States is a society that is producing substantial numbers of severely traumatized and psychologically damaged people. The crime of which Cruz is accused cannot be comprehended and explained in purely individual terms. In the final analysis, this latest massacre, like all the previous episodes of mass killings, is a manifestation of the extreme dysfunctionality of American society.

According to a tally by the *Washington Post*, since the Columbine massacre in 1999, 150,000 students at primary and secondary schools in the United States have experienced a school shooting on their campuses, with more than 400 deaths.

Indiscriminate killing inside a public school has become a mass phenomenon. The very words "school shooting" are a catchphrase that instantly conveys the images of dozens of bloodied bodies, a crazed, heavily armed young man (or men) firing at random, and students fleeing with their hands raised above their heads, crossing paths with police SWAT teams moving in the opposite direction.

Only the day before the Parkland massacre, a similar bloodbath was narrowly averted at a high school in Everett, Washington, just outside Seattle, when a grandmother alerted police when she found indications that her grandson, who lived with her, was planning to attack his school. The youth was found in possession of both guns and explosives sufficient to cause a massive death toll.

The crime that Cruz allegedly committed is horrifying. Many lives have been lost, and the survivors—families and friends—will never really recover emotionally from their terrible loss. The word

“closure,” when applied to the aftermath of such events, is among the most dishonest in the American idiom. It is understandable that people feel such anger and outrage over such an inhuman act. But Cruz did not emerge from hell. He is product of American society.

Cruz was born in 1998, making him only a few months old at the time of the massacre at Columbine High School, in April 1999. Throughout the entire course of his life, America has been waging its never-ending “War on Terror,” in which war overseas has been accompanied by relentless promotion of an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, xenophobia, and glorification of military-style violence.

The brutal harshness of every-day American life extracts a terrible toll in human suffering. Loneliness and alienation underlie the depressive illnesses that afflict so many millions of Americans. The social despair leads all too frequently to suicidal impulses. But it also erupts in episodes of homicidal violence.

During Cruz’s adolescence, there were four mass shootings in the space of five years in south and central Florida: seven killed at a Hialeah apartment building in 2013; the 2016 massacre at the Pulse night club in Orlando, where 49 were killed; a mass shooting at the Ft. Lauderdale International Airport in January 2017, leaving six dead; and the killing of six people in June 2017 at an Orlando factory. As recently as October 1, a gunman opened fire from his hotel room in Las Vegas, killing 58 people and wounding 851.

Adding to this atmosphere of violence, Cruz was enlisted in the Army ROTC, which promotes militarism on high school and college campuses. No doubt he could familiarize himself there with the use of the AR-15, the “civilian” version of the weapon which American soldiers carry on patrol in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and other countries.

The social context of massacre in Parkland will be, as it always is, ignored by the political leaders and corporate media. The dominant narrative in the “elite” media and political establishment is that everything is basically fine in America. After all, what can be wrong when the stock market rises to dizzying heights and money is raining down on the lucky few? If there is discontent, then it must be the product of interference by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But the Parkland tragedy exposes and refutes the ruling class’ delusionary evasion of the terrible truth

about the state of this country.

American capitalism has produced a society in which the killing of children as they attend school has become a common occurrence. One student who witnessed the carnage said in a television interview that the killing must stop. Yes, it must. But this will require the overthrow of this pathologically sick and inhuman capitalist society and its replacement with socialism.



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