

The fascist attack in Gilroy and the US epidemic of mass shootings

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The killing of three people at the Garlic Festival in Gilroy, California captured headlines across America, but the corporate media has sought to suppress or downplay its most important aspect: its politically motivated character.

Nineteen-year-old Santino William Legan opened fire with an AK-47 assault rifle inside the festival late Sunday afternoon. He killed three people—a six-year-old boy, a 13-year-old girl, and a 25-year-old man—and wounded at least 15 others before being shot to death by local police.

The three people he killed were Hispanic or African-American. This was apparently not an accident. Legan’s internet postings indicate he was motivated by racist and white-supremacist views. The most important indication was a piece of text urging, “Read *Might is Right* by Ragnar Redbeard,” followed by a complaint about “hordes of mestizos” (mixed-race people) allegedly crowding into towns in the Gilroy area.

The book Legan praises is *Might is Right or The Survival of the Fittest*, a social Darwinist, white supremacist screed first published in 1890, inspired by, among others, the reactionary German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. One passage in the book denounces the Declaration of Independence for the “degrading, self-evident lie” that “all men are created equal.” This is followed by imprecations against blacks, Asians, Jews and the poor, as well as those who live in “noxious” urban centers like London, Liverpool, New York, Chicago and New Orleans—language whose modern equivalent is Donald Trump’s denunciations of “rat-infested,” crime-plagued Baltimore.

Despite this clear evidence of Legan’s political sympathies, local police and the national media claimed that the motive for his attack was a mystery, and that it was just one more “senseless killing” of the type which

has become commonplace in the United States over the past three decades.

Not a single prominent media pundit or newspaper columnist made the obvious connection between Legan’s mentality and the fascistic hatred of immigrants and minorities promoted by the president of the United States, using mass rallies, comments to the media and tweets directed to a Twitter audience of more than 50 million.

The media cover-up only gained a certain plausibility because the Gilroy attack was one of ten instances of mass shooting across the United States over the past weekend. The casualty toll showed 15 deaths and 52 wounded.

The slaughter continued after the beginning of the work week. Tuesday morning at a Walmart in Southaven, Mississippi, a suburb of Memphis, Tennessee, a gunman shot two Walmart workers to death and wounded a policeman before he was himself shot and arrested.

The media response to these tragedies has been twofold: using them to disguise the specifically political aspects of the Gilroy, California attacks; and holding them up as proof of the need for stepped up repressive measures, including not only the usual liberal calls to restrict gun ownership, but stepped-up police powers as well.

Particularly noteworthy was an editorial in the *Washington Post*, owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, which made no mention of the fascistic beliefs of the gunman and declared that the Gilroy shootings were “an indictment of our gun laws.” The editorial went on to note the heavy security presence of police during the Gilroy attack, and their quick response, shooting Legan to death one minute after he opened fire. The implication was clear: quicker

and more massive police repression was in order.

In the two decades since the Columbine massacre made “mass shootings” a recognized category of events in the United States, the *World Socialist Web Site* has sought to develop a critical understanding of what is typically dismissed as “senseless violence” in America.

As we noted in a recent commentary, the two decades since Columbine coincide with the decomposition of American society under the impact of mounting social inequality and endless imperialist war:

It has also been two decades, more or less, since the declaration of the “war on terror” and the invasions of Afghanistan and later Iraq, two decades since the hijacking of a national election and the repudiation of any concern by the American bourgeoisie for democratic norms, two decades of mounting social inequality and two decades of unrelenting attacks on workers’ conditions of life...

American capitalist society is disintegrating. Mad, individual anti-social acts such as the one that occurred at Columbine will not be halted by the pious wishes, much less the indifference, of the powers that be.

There has been a change in the general category of “mass shootings,” which have increasingly acquired a political character.

Of course, the event that to a certain extent triggered the wave of mass killings, the Columbine murders, had an element of this. It was planned for Hitler’s birthday and the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombings. Now, however, such politically-motivated massacres happen with regularity, including the attack by a fascist gunman against a synagogue in Poway, California in April of this year and the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh in October 2018.

And as the example of the Gilroy, California attack demonstrates, far from “pious wishes” about an end to such violence, the current American government is deliberately inciting such atrocities. President Trump is pursuing a definite political strategy, politically facilitated by the Democrats, of stoking violence and creating the conditions for ever more authoritarian

measures.

The capitalist system as a whole is responsible. The bitter disappointment in Obama, the fascist incitement of Trump, in combination with the economic hardships and endless war, have encouraged or produced a new phenomenon, the openly right-wing mass shooter.



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