The tragic shooting and suicide in South Haven, Michigan

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On August 20, a tragic shooting, currently labeled a random attack, took place at South Beach in South Haven, Michigan, leaving two dead and one injured. The beach is a popular spot with local residents and visitors to the region, 120 miles northeast of Chicago on Lake Michigan.

In the incident, Chuck Skuza and his wife, Barb Skuza, residents of Kalamazoo, Michigan, were shot, with the former succumbing to his injuries at the scene. Mrs. Skuza remains in critical condition at Bronson Methodist Hospital. The third victim was the shooter, 19-year-old Aidan Ingalls, who committed suicide after the attack, which occurred on the pier at the beach. A 9 mm handgun was used in the shooting.

This relatively "minor" episode did not even qualify as a "mass shooting," according to a website that tracks such events. Gunviolencearchive.org defines a mass shooting as one with "a minimum of four victims shot, either injured or killed, not including any shooter who may also have been killed or injured in the incident." The website reports that 464 such shootings have occurred in the US in 2021. One took place in Flint, Michigan, the same day as the episode in South Haven.

In 2018, Ingalls, then 15 years old, turned himself in with his mother, Karissa Ingalls, after she discovered guns and explosives in the boy's room, an alleged "hit list" and plans to attack Paw Paw High School, which he attended. (Paw Paw is located in southwestern Michigan, some 30 miles from South Haven.)

Prosecutors demanded a harsh response, arguing that Ingalls should be tried as an adult. If they had prevailed, Ingalls, facing 10 felony weapons and explosives charges, could have gone to prison for 28 years.

A therapist who evaluated the adolescent testified that Ingalls suffered "from significant mental health issues, including anxiety, depression and a real sense of social awkwardness." A police investigation also indicated that his plan to attack Paw Paw High School included suicide, corroborating statements from his mother, who claimed he was suicidal. Karissa Ingalls also insisted the family attempted to seek the assistance of a local mental health agency, which ignored them.

Judge Jeffrey Dufon chose to try Ingalls as a juvenile, leading to a year sentence in a residential treatment center under the supervision of the Michigan Department of Human Services. Ingalls remained under the surveillance of the juvenile justice system, earning his GED during this period until he turned 19 roughly a month ago. Earlier this year, according to the *South Haven Tribune*, "Lake Michigan College records indicated he [Ingalls] had been named to the winter semester dean's list at LMC, where he was enrolled as a part-time student."

For the past two years, Ingalls worked at a local Big Boy restaurant in South Haven. A co-worker interviewed by the *Tribune* described Ingalls as "a close friend" and someone she "looked forward to seeing" when she came into work. The co-worker reported that Ingalls still "had suicidal tendencies. He would talk about it." She mentioned he came into his shift early on the day of the shooting: "He talked to people [and] left some stuff for people ... [before leaving] he turned around and waved at people. He said he'd be back." Noting his feelings following the initial lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, she stated, "He said, 'I should take my life anyways.' I thought that was strange." This is all very sad.

On August 23, local police and prosecutors who worked on the 2018 Ingalls case advanced their predictably reactionary response to the South Haven

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tragedy. Targeting Judge Dufon's decision to try Ingalls as a juvenile, Susan Zuiderveen, the prosecutor in the case and current chief prosecutor of the county, argued the only sure-fire way to avoid Friday's shooting would have been to try Ingalls as an adult.

In her statement, she said, "Law enforcement and the prosecutor's office recognized the extreme public safety threat and made the decision to try to prosecute him as an adult. ... This would have protected the public for a longer period and allowed the court to have jurisdiction for extended services and surveillance."

In a statement issued August 24, however, Van Buren County Chief Judge Kathleen Brickley refuted the prosecution's opportunist claims. She noted that the justice system was "a constant balancing act—balancing our rights and liberties as individuals with the safety and security of the public. … Those processes always work better when the different players in the justice system work together. In this case, after much deliberation, there was agreement by the elected prosecutor at the time that the chosen path forward was the right one, and there was no appeal of the court's decision."

Local police also commented on the shooting, following Zuiderveen's general line. Van Buren County Sheriff Daniel Abbott was quoted as saying, "You gotta take out people's ages in cases like this, you gotta look at the facts in cases like this, and you gotta address it in cases like this."

South Haven is a resort town with seven beaches or public access sites on Lake Michigan. South Beach is among the more notable and popular attractions in the area, featuring play equipment for children, a large lighthouse and unusual conditions that even make surfing possible.

When a gunman suddenly opens fire at the end of the pier, striking a couple before committing suicide in full view of young children and adults, what should be an enjoyable location on a mid-summer day is transformed into a horrific crime scene. A disturbing event like the one that took place at South Beach doesn't simply occur randomly but has roots in objective social conditions. Again, there have already been more than 450 mass shootings in 2021 in America!

The media and the political establishment respond to the endless succession of school, workplace and other types of mass killings with impotent calls for gun control, on the one hand, or strident demands for more repression and longer jail time, on the other. All of this is aimed at obscuring the underlying reality, that the United States is a deeply diseased, tormented society.

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