

Opinion

Man, and His Madness: The Curse of Post-Modernity (A Commentary on Mayhem and Gun Culture)

Mohan B*

LSU School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, United States Minor Outlying Islands, United States

***Corresponding author:** Mohan B, Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La 70803, United States, Tel: (225) 766-7631, E-mail: dialog@cox.net

Citation: Mohan B (2018) Man, and His Madness: The Curse of Post-Modernity. J Forensic Crime Stu 2: 102

Article history: Received: 26 February 2018, Accepted: 12 March 2018, Published: 14 March 2018

“Calderon told me that he once ran into Nikolas Cruz at a Walmart with a friend who knew him. This was after Cruz had been expelled from Stoneman Douglas. The two friends stood and listened as Cruz bragged about a shotgun he had just bought. The moment has been weighing on Calderon—he wishes he had told someone. As I talked to him, I wished that he didn’t have to carry such regrets. Other people had expressed fear of Cruz to law enforcement in the past, and none of it had kept Cruz from his guns. The first step of the Never Again movement was believing in an idea that the rest of America had grown too cynical to imagine: that Marjory Stoneman Douglas High really could be the last school shooting in America [1].”

“Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” Famously said Soren Kierkegaard. Michel Foucault has written volumes about the nature of total institutions. However modern-day schools need not be likened to such totality of experience [1]. R.D. Laing once said: “Childhood is a prison.” In light of educational-pedagogical revolution and schools today are designed to impart knowledge, life skills and pathways to human development which are crucial for an individual’s wellbeing. Every time a school shooting occurs, a misguided, confused boy from a troubled background tends to become an antihero. Theodore Cruz, the latest 18-year boy had proclaimed himself to be a “professional school shooter.” The questions one must raise at the outset is: Have schools failed? My answer is: No.

It’s the failure of culture and its politics which has failed our children. Of course, some families and communities may be scapegoated for expedience. The truth is: commoditization of education, general social inequality, and personal-social difficulties situate certain individuals who are tempted to dysfunctional, maladaptive manifestations. Guns and violence are powerful opiates of destructive aggressiveness which attracts world attention in a media-saturated society.

I have lived in the United States of America for more than four decades. I specialized in mental health policy after my doctoral research on hospitalized mental patients [2]. What I have found in the US is the rise of a therapeutic culture which benefits mental health industry. On the other hand, the cult of guns promoted by mindless politicians and dishonest gun owners has created a climate of fear, suspicion, and false romance to perpetuate the Second Amendment as an absolute birthright of every American. There is no document in governance which is absolute. Nothing is more nefariously misleading than their fallacious slogan: “Guns don’t kill, people do.”

Increasingly, conservative politicians are calling for arming the schools. Teachers are being tempted to have training in the use of AR 15; bonuses are being touted as a bribe. Arming of schools to protect children is the most insane strategy that I have heard of. As a teacher, I protest it [3].

Arming schools and teachers to protect children seems blissfully foolish. It amounts to the end of free education. I have been a teacher all my life and I have never touched a real gun. To ask me to carry or conceal a gun to go to class is an admission of failure and a pathetic confession of lack of imagination. Fortified schools will complete the dreaded design of a Deep State.

Apropos of columnist Eugene Robinson’s article on guns and mental health issues (The Advocate, 02/18/218; 7B), I believe the horrors of school mayhem have become an ugly reality of our daily lives. The cult of ritualized random violence endangers civility. There have been 300 mass shooting in the last three years (ABC World News, February 14, 2018). Each carnage invokes outcries for gun control, more guns, and mental health services. A society that cannot protect its children, women, and the poor breaks the social contract that was meant to save us from ourselves. “Save the nonsense about ‘good guys...’”, Mr. Robinson bluntly alarms. ‘Guns don’t kill people, people do’ is the most pernicious defense of the Second Amendment. Absolutism of the mantras of guns, god, and greed—a paradoxical reality in the world’s most civilized nation-- sustains a therapeutic culture which simply breeds monstrous freedom.

I doubt if public policies would change. Children, you have nothing to lose but your insecurities! A new civil rights movement seems in order. A principled mass protest is still a veritable tool to regain true freedom [4].

The nature of madness is a product of the mind that lost itself. "A history of insanity in the age of reason" is a complex phenomenon that endangers civilization [1].

"Children in a Missouri town are selling raffle tickets offering an AR-15 assault-style rifle as the prize to raise money for their baseball team. The rifle is the same type of weapon used last week in the Florida school shooting that killed 17 people [5]."

As a writer, one projects his/her impotent rage through words which may never see light of the day. The fact that all mass murderers are males, usually white, in America, leaves us with unsettling, unanswered questions. What's most outrageous is the governmental-organizational response to an unfathomable public-cultural tragedy: Arm teachers; fortify schools; more guns; allow people to carry concealed weapons, FBI failed us; and provide more mental health services! Nothing could be more disingenuous than criminalizing mental illness and legalizing school carnage.

This brief essay is about the moral-existential dissonance of a violence-prone culture and its numbness to fundamental civility. Carnage and mayhem are not new forms of murder; humanity has suffered perpetrators of these crimes in the name of varied cults. Civilization have risen and fallen on account of human destructiveness directed against its own kind. Mass murder is a human tragedy. Animal kingdom rests on the survivalist instinct. Human society endures violence and self-destruction more as a Darwinian manifestation of power than as a necessity to kill. Euphemism, delusions, and myths have perpetuated varied forms of pugnacious behaviors involving violence, war, rape and torture. The outcome is continuity of war; use of rape as weapon; and widespread magnitudes of mass murder.

Man, alone is a mass murderer. His incompleteness as a social creature is both a function and outcome of a dysfunctional civilization. The nexus of two algorisms ---*Angst, Anger and Avarice and Guns, God and Greed*—compounds a cultural crisis. The mental health industry exploits this situation to its advantage. DSM V, the Bible of mental disorders has a label for each human frailty. Politics of therapy by diagnosing crime and violence from tainted lenses simply criminalize mental illness. Even though some destructive behaviors may be outcomes of psychiatric disorder, there is no scientific evidence that criminality is a result of poor mental health. Therapeutic culture has created its own myths. Any solution to gun violence and school shootings seem appear woefully inadequate and ill-conceived.

A question must be asked: Why do citizens need military weapons? Why is it so easy for anyone to get AR 15? In a current film *15:17 to Paris* by famed director Clint Eastwood, one finds accidental heroism attributed to childhood gun culture, an obsessive love for war games and military weapons. The latter stardom is not a consequence of that gun culture, however. It's a result of professional military training that inspires patriotism against the perils of evil [6].

President Donald Trump favors arming teachers. He castigated the uniformed sheriff's deputy on duty at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The deputy resigned "after surveillance footage showed he waited outside the building rather than attempt to confront the killer."

"A teacher would have shot the hell out of him before he knew what happened," Trump said. "These teachers love their students. And these teachers are talented with weaponry and with guns. And I'd rather have somebody that loves their students and wants to protect their students than somebody standing outside that doesn't know anybody and doesn't know the students and frankly, for whatever reason, decided not to go in even though he heard lots of shots being fired [7]."

'Never again,' the students' movement against the carnage has gained momentum. "The torpor of Tallahassee notwithstanding, the Parkland students have managed to force their agenda," writes Emily Witt in the New Yorker [8]. I don't underestimate the force of public opinion and protest; but I have doubts if the children of millennials have the passion and strength to rise against the Deep State. A permissive society and its latent hedonism is essentially a built-in barrier to its self-transformation.

The idioms of confinement, concealment, associated with the logic of madness have fascinated Western culture. Michel Foucault explores this duality of reason and unreason in terms of human animality:

"From the start, Western culture has not considered it evident that animals participate in plentitude of nature, in its wisdom and its order: this idea was a late one and long remained on the surface of culture; perhaps it has not yet penetrated very deeply into the subterranean regions of imagination. In fact, on close examination, it becomes evident that the animal belongs rather to and anti-nature, to a negativity that threatens order and by frenzy endangers the positive wisdom of nature [1]."

References

1. Foucault M (1965) *Madness and Civilization*. New York: Vintage Books.
2. Mohan B (1972) *Social Psychiatry in India*. Calcutta: Minerva.
3. Emily Witt (2018) How the survivors of Parkland began the Never Again movement? *The New Yorker*, February 19.
4. A Letter to the Editor, *The Advocate*. Feb 15 and 18, 2018.
5. Mary Papenfuss (2018) Missouri Third-Graders Selling AR-15 Raffle Tickets for Their Baseball Team The fundraiser is going ahead despite mounting controversy.

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6. *The 15:17 to Paris* is a 2018 American biographical drama film produced and directed by Clint Eastwood and written by Dorothy Blyskal, based on the autobiography *The 15:17 to Paris: The True Story of a Terrorist, a Train, and Three American Soldiers* by Jeffrey E. Stern, Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler and Alek Skarlatos. The film stars Stone, Sadler and Skarlatos as themselves and follows the trio as they stop the 2015 Thalys train attack; Judy Greer and Jenna Fischer also star.
 7. Trump on Parkland shooter: A teacher would have shot the hell out of him before he knew what happened. (accessed February 24, 2018).
 8. Urgency and Frustration: The Never Again Movement Gathers Momentum. (accessed Feb 24, 2018).