

# School Shooters and Drones

Allegra Harpootlian links gun violence at home to U.S. wars abroad.

By [Allegra Harpootlian](#)

[TomDispatch.com](#)



In the wake of the Feb. 14, 2018, mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which killed 17 students and staff members, a teacher [said](#) the school looked “like a war zone.” And to many young Americans, that’s exactly what it felt like. But this shooting was different. Refusing to be victims, Parkland survivors disrupted the [“thoughts and prayers”](#) cycle by immediately rallying student activists and adults across the country, mobilizing them around such tragedies and the [weapons of war](#) that often facilitate them.

[Recent history](#) suggested that such a movement, sure to be unable to keep the public’s attention or exert significant pressure on lawmakers, would collapse almost instantly. Yet, miraculously enough, the same fear – of their school being next – that had kept young Americans paralyzed for almost 20 years was what drove these newly impassioned activists not to back down.

Let me say that, much as I admire them, I look at their remarkable movement from an odd perspective. You see, I grew up in the “school-shooting era” and now work for a non-profit called [ReThink Media](#) tracking coverage of the American drone war that has been going on for 17 years.

To me, the U.S. military and CIA drones that hover constantly over eight countries across the Greater Middle East and Africa, and regularly terrorize, maim, and kill civilians, including children, are the equivalents of the disturbed shooters in American schools. But that story is hard to find anywhere in this country. What reports Americans do read about those drone strikes usually focus on successes (a major terrorist taken out in a distant land), not the “collateral damage.”

With that in mind, let me return to those teenage activists against gun violence who quickly grasped three crucial things. The first was that such violence can't be dealt with by focusing on gun control alone. You also have to confront the other endemic problems exacerbating the gun violence epidemic, including inadequate mental health resources, systemic racism and police brutality, and the depth of economic inequality. As Parkland teen organizer Edna Chavez explained, “Instead of police officers we should have a department specializing in restorative justice. We need to tackle the root causes of the issues we face and come to an understanding of how to resolve them.”

The second was that, no matter how much you shouted, you had to be aware of the privilege of being heard. In other words, when you shouted, you had to do so not just for yourself but for all those voices so regularly drowned out in this country. After all, black Americans represent the majority of gun homicide victims. Black children are 10 times as likely to die by gun and yet their activism on the subject has been largely demonized or overlooked even as support for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas students rolled

in.

The third was that apathy is the enemy of progress, which means that to make change you have to give people a sense of engagement and empowerment. As one of the Parkland students, [Emma Gonzalez](#), put it: “What matters is that the majority of American people have become complacent in a senseless injustice that occurs all around them.”

### **Washington’s Expanding Drone Wars**

Here’s the irony, though: while those teenagers continue to talk about the repeated killing of innocents in this country, their broader [message](#) could easily be applied to another type of violence that, in all these years, Americans have paid next to no attention to: the U.S. drone war.

Unlike school shootings, drone strikes killing civilians in distant lands rarely make the news here, much less the headlines. Most of us at least now know what it means to live in a country where school shootings are an almost weekly news story. Drones are another matter entirely, and beyond the innocents they so regularly slaughter, there are long-term effects on the communities they are attacking.

As [Veterans for Peace](#) put it, “Here at home, deaths of students and others killed in mass shootings and gun violence, including suicide gun deaths, are said to be the price of freedom to bear arms. Civilian casualties in war are written off as ‘collateral damage,’ the price of freedom and U.S. security.”

And yet, after 17 years, three presidents, and little transparency, America’s drone wars have never truly made it

into the national conversation. Regularly marketed over those years as “precise” and “surgical,” drones have always been seen by lawmakers as a “sexy,” casualty-free solution to fighting the bad guys, while protecting American blood and treasure.

According to reports, President Donald Trump actually expanded the U.S. global drone war, while removing the last shreds of transparency about what those drones are doing – and even who’s launching them. One of his first orders on entering the Oval Office was to secretly reinstate the CIA’s ability to launch drone strikes that are, in most cases, not even officially acknowledged. And since then, it’s only gotten worse. Just last week, he revoked an Obama-era executive order that required the director of national intelligence to release an annual report on civilian and combatant casualties caused by CIA drones and other lethal operations. Now, not only are the rules of engagement – whom you can strike and under what circumstances– secret, but the Pentagon no longer even reveals when drones have been used, no less when civilians die from them. Because of this purposeful opaqueness, even an estimate of the drone death toll no longer exists.

Still, in the data available on all U.S. airstrikes since Trump was elected, an alarming trend is discernible: there are more of them, more casualties from them, and ever less accountability about them. In Iraq and Syria alone, the monitoring group Airwars believes that the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS is responsible for between 7,468 and 11,841 civilian deaths, around 2,000 of whom were children.

(The U.S.-led coalition, however, only admits to killing 1,139 civilians.)

In Afghanistan, the U.N. recently found that U.S. airstrikes (including drone strikes) had killed approximately the same number of Afghan civilians in 2018 as in the previous three years put together. In response to this report, the U.S.-led NATO mission there claimed that “all feasible precautions” were being taken to limit civilian casualties and that it investigates all allegations of their occurrence. According to such NATO investigations, airstrikes by foreign forces caused 117 civilian casualties last year, including 62 deaths – about a fifth of the U.N. tally.

And those are only the numbers for places where Washington is officially at war. In Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Libya, even less information is available on the number of civilians the U.S. has killed. Experts who track drone strikes in such gray areas of conflict, however, place that number in the thousands, though there is no way to confirm them, as even our military acknowledges. U.S. Army Colonel Thomas Veale, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS, put it this way last year: “As far as how do we know how many civilians were killed, I am just being honest, no one will ever know. Anyone who claims they will know is lying, and there’s no possible way.”

After a U.S. strike killed or injured an entire Afghan family, the trauma surgeon treating a 4-year-old survivor told NBC, “I am sad. A young boy with such big injuries. No eyes, brain out. What will be his future?”

In other words, while America’s teenagers fight in the most

public way possible for their right to live, a world away [Afghanistan's](#) teenagers are [marching](#) for the same thing – except instead of gun control, in that heavily armed land, they want peace.

## Trauma Is Trauma Is Trauma

Gun violence – and school shootings in particular – have become the preeminent fear of American teenagers. A [Pew poll](#) taken last year found that 57 percent of teens are worried about a shooting at their school (1-in-4 are “very worried.”) This is even truer of nonwhite teens, with roughly two-thirds of them expressing such fear.

As one student told [Teen Vogue](#): “How could you not feel a little bit terrified knowing that it happens so randomly and so often?” And she’s not exaggerating. More than 150,000 students in the U.S have experienced a shooting on campus since the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, considered the first modern mass school shooting.

And in such anticipatory anxiety, American students have much in common with victims of drone warfare. Speaking to researchers from Stanford University, [Haroon Quddoos](#), a Pakistani taxi driver who survived two U.S. drone strikes, explained it this way:

“No matter what we are doing, that fear is always inculcated in us. Because whether we are driving a car, or we are working on a farm, or we are sitting home playing... cards – no matter what we are doing, we are always thinking the drone will strike us. So we are scared to do anything, no matter what.”

Similar symptoms of post-traumatic stress, trauma, and anxiety are commonplace emotions in countries where U.S. drones are active, just as in American communities like Parkland that have lived through a mass shooting. Visiting communities in Yemen that experienced drone strikes, forensic psychologist Peter Schaapveld found that 92 percent of their inhabitants were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, with children the most significantly affected. Psychologists have come up with similar figures when studying both survivors of school shootings and children who have been psychologically affected by school-lockdown drills, by the media's focus on violence, and by the culture of fear that has developed in response to mass shootings.

## **Voices Left Out**

The Parkland students have created a coherent movement that brings together an incredibly diverse group united around a common goal and a belief that all gun violence victims, not just those who have experienced a mass shooting, need to be heard. As one Parkland survivor and leader of the March For Our Lives movement, David Hogg, put it, the goal isn't to talk for different communities, but to let them "speak for themselves and ask them how we can help."

The Parkland survivors have essentially created an echo chamber, amplifying the previously unheard voices of young African-Americans and Latinos in particular. At last year's March For Our Lives, for instance, 11-year-old Naomi Wadler started her speech this way: "I am here today to acknowledge and represent the African-American girls whose stories don't make the front page of every national

newspaper, whose stories don't lead the evening news."

In 2016, there were nearly 39,000 gun deaths, more than 14,000 of them homicides and almost 23,000 suicides. Such routine gun violence disproportionately affects black Americans. Mass shootings accounted for only about 1.2 percent of all gun deaths that year. Yet the Parkland students made headlines and gained praise for their activism – Oprah Winfrey even donated \$500,000 to the movement – while black communities that had been fighting gun violence for years never received anything similar.

As someone who spends a lot of her time engrossed in the undercovered news of drone strikes, I can't help but notice the parallels. Stories about U.S. drone strikes taking out dangerous terrorists proliferate, while reports on U.S.-caused civilian casualties disappear into the void. For example, in January, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command claimed that a precision drone strike finally killed Jamel Ahmed Mohammed Ali al-Badawi, the alleged mastermind behind the deadly October 2000 suicide bombing of the *USS Cole* in Yemen. Within a day, more than 24 media outlets had covered the story.

Few, however, focused on the fact that the U.S. command only claimed al-Badawi's death was "likely," despite similar reports about such terrorists that have repeatedly been proven wrong. The British human rights group Reprieve found back in 2014 that even when drone operators end up successfully targeting specific individuals like al-Badawi, they regularly kill vastly more people than their chosen targets. Attempts to kill 41 terror figures, Reprieve reported, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,147



people. That was five years ago, but there's no reason to believe anything has changed.

By contrast, when a U.S. airstrike – it's not clear whether it was a drone or a manned aircraft – killed at least 20 civilians in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in December 2018, only four American media outlets (Reuters, the Associated Press, Voice of America, and The New York Times) covered the story and none followed up with a report on those civilians and their families. That has largely been the norm since the war on terror began with the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. In the Trump years so far, while headlines scream about mass school shootings and other slaughters of civilians here, the civilian casualties of America's wars and the drone strikes that often go with them are, if anything, even more strikingly missing in action in the media.

When Safa al-Ahmad, a journalist for PBS's Frontline, was asked why she thought it was important to hear from Yemenis experiencing American drone strikes, she responded:

“I think if you're going to talk about people, you should go talk to them. It's just basic respect for other human beings. It really bothered me that everyone was just talking about the Americans... The other civilians, they weren't given any names, they weren't given any details. It was like an aside to the story... This is part of the struggle when you construct stories on foreign countries, when it comes to the American public. I think we've done [Americans] a disservice, by not doing more of this... We impact the world, we should understand it. An informed public is the only way there can be a functioning democracy. That is our duty as a

democracy, to be informed.”

This one-sided view of America’s never-ending air wars fails everyone, from the people being asked to carry out Washington’s decisions in those lands to ordinary Americans who have little idea what’s being done in their name to the many people living under those drones. Americans should know that, to them, it’s we who seem like the school shooters of the planet.

### **Waking Up an Apathetic Nation**

For the better part of two decades, young Americans have been trapped in a cycle of violence at home and abroad with little way to speak out. Gun violence in this country was a headline-grabbing given. School shootings, like so many other mass killings here, were deemed “tragic” and worthy of thoughts, prayers, and much fervid media attention, but little else.

Until Parkland.

What changed? Well, a new cohort, Generation Z, came on the scene and, unlike their millennial predecessors, many of them are refusing to accept the status quo, especially when it comes to issues like gun violence.

Every time there was a mass shooting, millennials would hold their breath, wondering if today would be the day the country finally woke up. After Newtown. After San Bernadino. After Las Vegas. And each time, it wasn’t. Parkland could have been the same, if it hadn’t been for those meddling kids. Having witnessed the dangers of apathy, Gen-Z seems increasingly to be about movement and action. In fact,

in a Vice youth survey, 71 percent of respondents reported feeling “capable” of enacting change around global warming and 85 percent felt the same about social problems. And that’s new.

For so long, gun violence seemed like an unstoppable, incurable plague. Fed up with the “adults in the room,” however, these young activists have begun to take matters into their own hands, giving those particularly at risk of gun violence, children, a sense of newfound power – the power to determine their own futures. Whether it’s testifying in front of Congress in the first hearing on gun violence since 2011, protesting at the stores and offices of gun manufacturers, or participating in “die-ins,” these kids are making their voices heard.

Since the Parkland massacre, there has been actual movement on gun control, something that America has not seen for a long time. Under pressure, the Justice Department moved to ban the bump stocks that can make semi-automatic weapons fire almost like machine guns, Florida signed a \$400 million bill to tighten the state’s gun laws, companies began to cut ties with the National Rifle Association, and public support grew for stricter gun control laws.

Although the new Gen Z activists have focused on issues close to home, sooner or later they may start to look beyond the water’s edge and find themselves in touch with their counterparts across the globe, who are showing every day how dedicated they are to changing the world they live in, with or without anyone’s help. And if they do, they will find that, in its endless wars, America has been the true

school shooter on this planet, terrorizing the global classroom with a remarkable lack of consequences.

In March 2018, [according to](#) Human Rights Watch, American planes bombed a school that housed displaced people in Syria, killing dozens of them, including children. Similarly, in Yemen that August, a Saudi plane, using a [Pentagon-supplied](#) laser-guided bomb, blew away a school bus, killing 40 schoolchildren. Just as at home, it's not only about the weaponry like those planes or drones. Activists will find that they have to focus their attention as well on the root causes of such violence and the scars they leave behind in the communities of survivors.

More tolerant, more [diverse](#), less trustful of major institutions and less inclined to believe in American exceptionalism than any generation before them, Generation Z may be primed to care about what their country is doing in their name from Afghanistan to Syria, Yemen to Libya. But first they have to know it's happening.

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At War With Ourselves: The Domestic

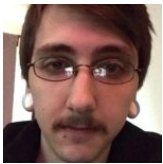
# Consequences of Foreign Policies

There is a direct connection between gun violence and suicide rates in the United States and America's aggressive foreign policy, argues Will Porter.

## How America's Gun Violence Epidemic May Have Roots in Overseas War Zones

By Will Porter

*Special to Consortium News*



In recent months a string of school shootings in the United States has rekindled the debate over gun violence, its causes and what can be done to stop it. But amid endless talk of school shootings and AR-15s, a large piece of the puzzle has been left conspicuously absent from the debate.

Contrary to the notion that mass murderers are at the heart of America's gun violence problem, data from recent years reveals that the majority of gun deaths are self-inflicted.

In 2015, suicides accounted for over 60 percent of gun deaths in the U.S., while homicides made up around 36 percent of that year's total. Guns are consistently the most common method by which people take their own lives.

While the causes of America's suicide-driven gun epidemic are complex and myriad, it's clear that one group contributes to the statistics above all others: military veterans.

### **Beyond the Physical**

According to a 2016 study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, on average some 20 veterans commit suicide every single day, making them among the most prone to take their own lives compared to people working in other professions. Though they comprise under 9 percent of the American population, veterans accounted for 18 percent of suicides in the U.S. in 2014.

When veterans return home from chaotic war zones, resuming normal civilian life can present major difficulties. The stresses of wartime create a long-term, sustained "fight-or-flight" response, not only producing physical symptoms such as sweating, shaking or a racing heart rate, but inflicting a mental and moral toll as well.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) accounts for some of the physiological

effects of trauma, the “fight-or-flight” response, but the distinct mental, moral and spiritual anguish experienced by many veterans and other victims of trauma has been termed “moral injury.”

A better understanding of that concept and the self-harm it motivates could go a long way toward explaining, and ultimately solving, America’s suicide epidemic.

“Moral injury looks beyond the physical and asks who we are as people,” Peter Van Buren, a former State Department Foreign Service officer, said in an interview. “It says that we know right from wrong, and that when we violate right and wrong, we injure ourselves. We leave a scar on ourselves, the same as if we poked ourselves with a knife.”

While not a veteran himself, during his tenure with the Foreign Service Van Buren served for one year alongside American soldiers at a forward operating base in Iraq. His experiences there would stick with him for life.

“Over the course of the year I was there, the units I was embedded with lost three men, and all of them were lost to suicide, not to enemy action,” Van Buren said. “This left an extraordinary impression on me, and triggered in me some of the things that I write about.”

After retiring from the Foreign Service, Van Buren began research for his novel “Hooper’s War,” a fictional account set in WWII Japan. The book centers on American veteran, Nate Hooper, and explores the psychological costs paid by those who survive a war. Van Buren said if he set the book in the past, he thought he could better explore the subject matter without the baggage of current-day politics.

In his research, Van Buren interviewed Japanese civilians who were children at the time of the conflict and found surprising parallels with the soldiers he served with in Iraq. Post-war guilt, he found, does not only afflict the combatants who fight and carry out grisly acts of violence, but civilians caught in the crossfire as well.

For many, merely living through a conflict when others did not is cause for significant distress, a condition known as “survivor’s guilt.”

“In talking with them I heard so many echoes of what I’d heard from the soldiers in Iraq, and so many echoes of what I felt myself, this profound sense of guilt,” Van Buren said.

### **‘We Killed Them’**

Whether it was something a soldier did, saw or failed to prevent, feelings of

guilt can leave a permanent mark on veterans after they come home.

Brian Ellison, a combat veteran who served under the National Guard in Iraq in 2004, said he's still troubled by his wartime experiences.

Stationed at a small, under protected maintenance garage in the town of ad-Diwaniyah in a southeastern province of Iraq, Ellison said his unit was attacked on a daily basis.

"From the day we got there, we would get attacked every night like clockwork—mortars, RPGs," Ellison said. "We had no protection; we had no weapons systems on the base."

On one night in April of 2004, after a successful mission to obtain ammunition for the base's few heavy weapons, Ellison's unit was ready to hit back.

"So we got some rounds for the Mark 19 [a belt-fed automatic grenade launcher] and we basically used it as field artillery, shot it up in the air and lobbed it in," Ellison said. "Finally on the last night we were able to get them to stop shooting, but that was because we killed 5 of them. At the time this was something I was proud of. We were like 'We got them, we got our revenge.'"

"In retrospect, it's like here's this foreign army, and we're in their neighborhood," Ellison said. "They're defending their neighborhood, but they're the bad guys and we're the good guys, and we killed them. I think about stuff like that a lot."

Despite his guilt, Ellison said he was able to sort through the negative feelings by speaking openly and honestly about his experiences and actions. Some veterans have a harder time, however, including one of Ellison's closest friends.

"He ended up going overseas like five times," Ellison said. "Now he's retired and he can't even deal with people. He *can't* deal with people, it's sad. He was this funny guy, everybody's friend, easy to get along with, now he's a recluse. It's really weird to see somebody like that. He had three young kids and a happy personality, now he's broken."

In addition to the problems created in their personal relationships, the morally injured also often turn to self-destructive habits to cope with their despair.

"In the process of trying to shut this sound off in your head—this voice of conscience—many people turn to drugs and alcohol as a way of shutting that voice up, at least temporarily," Van Buren said. "You hope at some point it shuts up permanently . . . Unfortunately, I think that many people do look for the

permanent silence of suicide as a way of escaping these feelings.”

### **A Hero's Welcome?**

By now most are familiar with the practice of celebrating veterans as heroes upon their return from war, but few realize what psychological consequences such apparently benevolent gestures can have.

“I think the healthiest thing a vet can do is to come to terms with reality,” Ellison said. “It’s so easy to get swept up—when we came home off the plane, there was a crowd of people cheering for us. I just remember feeling dirty. I felt like ‘I don’t want you to cheer for us,’ but at the same time it’s comforting. It’s a weird dynamic. Like, I could just put this horror out of my mind and pretend we were heroes.”

“But the terrible part is that, behind that there’s reality,” Ellison said. “Behind that, we know what we were doing; we know that we weren’t fighting for freedom. So when somebody clings onto this ‘we were heroes’ thing, I think that’s bad for them. They have to be struggling with it internally. I really believe that’s one of the biggest things that contributes to people committing suicide. They’re not able to talk about it, not able to bring it to the forefront and come to terms with it.”

### **Unclear Solution**

According to the 2016 VA study, 70 percent of veterans who commit suicide are not regular users of VA services.

The Department of Veteran Affairs was set up in 1930 to handle medical care, benefits and burials for veterans, but some 87 years later, the department is plagued by scandal and mismanagement. Long wait times, common to many government-managed healthcare systems, discourage veterans from seeking the department’s assistance, especially those with urgent psychiatric needs.

An independent review was carried out in 2014 by the VA’s Inspector General, Richard Griffin, which found that at one Arizona VA facility, 1,700 veterans were on wait lists, waiting an average of 115 days before getting an initial appointment.

“People don’t generally seek medical help because the [VA] system is so inefficient and ineffective; everyone feels like it’s a waste of time,” said a retired senior non-commissioned officer in the Special Operations Forces (SOF) who wished to remain anonymous.

“The system is so bad, even within the SOF world where I work, that I avoid



going at all costs,” the retired officer said. “I try to get my guys to civilian hospitals so that they can get quality healthcare instead of military healthcare.”

Beyond institutions, however, both Ellison and Van Buren agreed that speaking openly about their experiences has been a major step on their road back to normalcy. Open dialogue, then, is not only one way for veterans and other victims of trauma to heal, it may ultimately be the key to solving America’s epidemic of gun violence.

The factors contributing to mass murders, school shootings and private crime are, no doubt, important to study, but so long as suicide is left out of the public discourse on guns, genuine solutions may always be just out of reach.

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## The Role of Youth in a Hoped-for Transformation

The massive turnout for the March for Our Lives demonstration in Washington on March 24 has given rise to hope that a new youth movement can spur a social transformation in the United States, write Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers.

**By Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers**

The eruption of youth protests over gun violence in schools and other issues is another indicator that the [2020s could be a decade of transformation](#) where people [demand economic, racial and environmental justice](#) as well as peace. Students who are in their teens now will be in their twenties then. They will have experience in how protests can change political culture.

Some view the youth awakening in these protests as [reminiscent of youth movements](#) in previous generations, others are less optimistic. We cannot predict the role this generation will play, but throughout the history of mass movements, youth have been a key factor by pushing boundaries and demanding change.

One of the slogans in the actions against gun violence is “adults failed to solve the problem.” The truth is, as many youth are aware, those currently in power have failed on many fronts, e.g. climate change, wealth disparity, racial injustice, never-ending wars and militarism, lack of health care and more. These crises are coming to a head and provide the environment for transformational changes, if we act.

### **Beware of Democratic Party Co-option**

One of the challenges youth, and older, activists face is the Democratic Party. Democrats have a long history of co-opting political movements. They are present in recent mobilizations, such as the Women’s March and March for our Lives, which both centered on voting as the most important action to take.

Big Democratic Party donors, like George and Amal Clooney, provided massive resources to the March for Our Lives. The corporate media covered the students extensively, encouraged attendance at the marches and reported widely on them.

As Bruce Dixon writes, “It’s not hard to see the hand of the Democratic party behind the tens of millions in corporate contributions and free media accorded the March For Our Lives mobilization. 2018 is a midterm election year, and November is only seven months away. The Democrats urgently need some big sticks with which to beat out the vote this fall..”

Democratic politicians see the gun issue as an opportunity for the ‘Blue Wave’ they envision for 2018, even though the Democrat’s history of confronting gun violence has been dismal. When Democrats controlled Congress and the presidency, they did not challenge the culture of violence, confront the NRA or stop militarized policing that is resulting in hundreds of killings by police.

Ajamu Baraka writes, “Liberals and Democrat party connected organizations and networks have been quite adept at getting out in front of movements to pre-empt their radical potential and steer them back into the safe arms of liberal conformism.” Indeed the history of the Democratic Party since its founding as a slave-owners party has been one of absorbing political movements and weakening them.

For this new generation of activists to reach their potential, they must understand we live in a mirage democracy and cannot elect our way out of these crises. Our tasks are much larger. Violence is deeply embedded in US culture, dating to the founding of the nation when gun laws were designed for white colonizers to take land from Indigenous peoples and control black slaves.

When it comes to using the gun issue for elections, the challenge for the Democrats is “to keep the public anger high, but the discussion shallow,

limited, and ahistorical,” as Bruce Dixon writes. Our task is to understand the roots of the crises we face.

Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes this in her new book, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. The culture of violence in the US goes beyond the horrific shooting in schools to the militarization of our communities and military aggression abroad. The US military has killed more than 20 million people in 37 nations since World War II.

One step you can take in your community is to find out if there is a Junior ROTC program in your local school and shut it down.

### **Potential for Youth to Lead in Era of Transformation**

One of the reasons we predict the 2020s may be an era of transformation is because issues that have been ignored or mishandled by powerholders are becoming so extreme they can no longer be ignored. Bruce Dixon of Black Agenda Report writes the gun protests present an opportunity to highlight all the issues where Democrats (and Republicans) have failed us.

Youth are already involved, often playing leadership roles, in many fronts of struggle. Rev. Jared Sawyer, Jr. writes that when racial violence arose at the “University of Missouri in recent years, student athletes and scholars united in protest, prompting the administration to take action. Organizations like Black Youth Power 100 have arisen in the wake of police” violence against black people. Youth are on the front lines of the environmental movement, blocking pipelines and carbon infrastructure to prevent climate change. Youth are leading the movement to protect immigrants from mass deportation.

This week, Hampton students took to the streets over sexual violence, housing, food and other problems on campus. Students at Howard University started HU Resist, to “make sure that Howard University fulfills its mission.” They are in their third day of occupying the administration building.

At March for Our Lives protests, some participants saw the connections between gun violence and other issues. Tom Hall reported that those who “attended the rally had far more on their minds than gun control and the midterm elections—the issues promoted by the media and the Democratic Party. Many sought to connect the epidemic of mass shootings in American schools to broader issues, from the promotion of militarism and war, to poverty and social inequality.” Youth also talked about tax cuts for the rich, inadequate healthcare, teacher strikes, the need for jobs and a better quality of life. He noted those who attended were “searching for a political perspective,” and that, while it was not seen from the stage, opposition to war was a common concern.

Robert Koehler writes, “This emerging movement must address the whole spectrum of violence.” He includes racist violence, military violence, mass incarceration and the “mortally sinful corporate greed and of course, the destruction of the environment and all the creatures.” What unites all of these issues, Koehler writes, is the “ability to dehumanize certain people.” Dehumanization is required to allow mass murder, whether by a single gunman or in war, as well as the economic violence that leaves people homeless and hungry, or for the violence of denying people necessary healthcare and to pay people so little they need multiple jobs to survive.

### **Movements are Growing, Now How Do We Win?**

We have written about the stages of successful social movements and that overall the United States is in the final stage before victory. This is the era of building national consensus on solutions to the crises we face and mobilizing millions to take action in support of these solutions.

Protests have been growing in the US over the past few decades. Strong anti-globalization protests were organized under Clinton to oppose the World Trade Organization. Under the Bush administration, hundreds of thousands of people took the streets against the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. The anti-war movement faded under the Obama administration, even though he escalated US militarism, but other movements arose such as Occupy, immigrant’s rights, the fight for 15, Idle No More and black lives matter. Erica Chenoweth posits that current youth activists “did their first activism with their moms. It’s a quicker learning curve for kids.”

At present, large drivers of mass protests are reaction to the actions of the Trump administration and the Democrats using their resources to augment and steer anti-Trump anger into elections. To prevent what happened to the anti-war movement under President Obama, people will need a broader understanding of the root causes of the crises we face, not the shallow analysis provided by the corporate media, and will need to understand how social movements can be effective.

To assist in this education, **Popular Resistance is launching the Popular Resistance School**. The first eight week course will begin on May 1 and will cover social movement theory – how social movements develop, how they win and roles people and organizations play in movements. All are welcome to participate in the school. There is no cost to join, but we do ask those who are able to donate to help cover the costs.

For more information on the school and to sign up, click here. Those who sign up will receive a weekly video lecture, a curriculum and an invitation to join a

discussion group (each one will be limited to 30 participants). People who complete the course can then host the course locally with virtual support from Popular Resistance.

The next decade has the potential to be transformative. To make it so, we must not only develop national consensus that issues are being mishandled, that policies need to change and that we can change them, but we must also educate ourselves on issues and how to be effective. We have the power to create the change we want to see.

*This piece was first published on [PopularResistance.org](https://www.popularresistance.org)*

**Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers are co-directors of Popular Resistance.**

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## Gun Rights and ‘Freedom’s’ Perversities

The concept of personal freedoms is relatively new to human history but has often, ironically, been exploited by people in power to achieve or maintain a sociopolitical goal, posits Lawrence Davidson in this analysis.

By Lawrence Davidson

For much of human history, the idea of freedom had little meaning. This was because life was, as Thomas Hobbes put it, “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” And while he thought this descriptor applied to life outside of society, for a long time it did not really matter – life within pre-modern societies often had the same limiting character. Religious belief in these same times reflected this depressing fact by asserting that there was no hope of meaningful freedom in this life. To achieve it you would have to die and go to Heaven. So, what set you free was death.

Around the end of the 18th century, progress in technology and science suggested an alternative to this “life is a vale of tears” scenario. It was at that point that different types of freedoms started to become viable goals. However, as the use of the plural implies, the idea of freedom manifested itself in discrete categories: political freedom, economic freedom (here defined as freedom from want), religious freedom, freedom of speech and press, and so forth. It really had to be this way. Total freedom produces anarchy and – here is the irony – anarchy will quickly make any particular freedom meaningless.

Thus it was that over time, as constitutions came into vogue, freedoms were written down, usually in the form of rights. Yet, not surprisingly, their translation into practice often ended up reflecting the needs and desires of the

powerful and influential. This was the case whether we are considering democracies or more authoritarian forms of government. This customizing of freedoms by select groups inevitably led to less than satisfactory, and sometimes quite perverse, results.

Let's take a look at an example of such a conceptual deformity taken from the practice in the United States, "the land of the free."

### **Gun Rights – A Perversion of Freedom**

Perhaps the most perverse American definition of freedom is the one that promotes largely unrestricted gun rights. The champion of this definition is the National Rifle Association (NRA). We are not just talking about guns used to shoot at targets or for hunting game. One can actually make an argument for ownership of the latter weapons along the same line as bows and arrows, slingshots and fishing rods. However, according to Wayne LaPierre, the NRA's executive vice president, freedom demands more. His stand is that citizens have a fundamental right to own almost any firearm, including military-style assault weapons. His position is that this right is the sine qua non of American freedom. And only by exercising it can you really ensure individual freedom.

LaPierre insists that gun ownership is enshrined in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and the NRA has taken an out-of-context fragment of that amendment as its motto – "The Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms Shall Not Be Infringed." The fact that this phrase is part of a comprehensive statement that ties gun ownership to the government's need to maintain "a well regulated militia" is disregarded by the NRA leadership. In truth, if we are to take the Second Amendment in its entirety as describing a discrete "freedom," Mr. LaPierre and his buddies would have to join the National Guard in order to play with guns.

So here is a case where a definition of a freedom or a right has been customized to meet the demands of a politically powerful subgroup of society, and it has had predictably disastrous results. The largely open-ended access of U.S. citizens to military-style weapons has resulted in a prolonged bloodbath. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2014, there was a mass shooting (defined as the killing or wounding of 4 or more people) in the United States every 64 days. This rate has not slowed down in the last four years. As the world now knows, the latest of these massacres came on 14 February 2018, when 17 high school students were shot dead in Parkland, Florida.

Soon after this massacre, Wayne LaPierre gave the NRA's response to those surviving students and their supporters who were demanding greater gun regulation laws. He accused them of being "socialists" who want to make "law

abiding" citizens "less free." If these "leftists" manage to "seize power ... our American freedoms could be lost and our country will be changed forever."

LaPierre's answer to the bloodbaths caused by guns is to have more guns. "The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun." In the case of the Parkland high school shooting, where, in fact, there was an armed guard present at the school, as well as with previous school shootings, LaPierre's formula translates into arming teachers as a way of "hardening the schools."

By the way, President Trump initially agreed with LaPierre. He too called for arming teachers, suggesting that if 20 percent of teachers were armed and "adept with the firearm, they could end the attack very quickly." Assuming Trump meant giving teachers a sidearm while the usual assailants continue to use military-style automatic weapons, one can only call such a suggestion naive. He also praised the NRA leadership and specifically LaPierre, saying that "they are great people and great American patriots who will do the right thing."

Subsequently, Trump suggested that the country may well need to toughen its gun laws, much to the dismay of all those "patriots" at the NRA. Twenty-four hours later he was back on track with the NRA. Perhaps his flip-flopping was a tactical maneuver. Throw out some reforms and then do nothing. Later he can then say to the general public, perhaps during a reelection campaign, that he proved more willing to sign off on gun control reform than any president in history. Trump is famous for such mendacious hyperboles.

In the end LaPierre and all the the other gun fanatics who whittle their definition of freedom down to the nearly unrestricted right to own weapons are archaic primitives whose idea of freedom harkens back to those pre-civilized times so well described by Thomas Hobbes. In a perpetually dangerous world, one that is "poor, nasty, brutish and short," the armed man is the only one with any chance of being "free." And so, he is the "real man," the man who can protect himself, his family and his country.

But that is not the way the world is, at least in the West. It is a relatively settled and safe place where the major threat is not so much crime, and certainly not socialists, but rather LaPierre's own demand – the proliferation of guns. What we are all threatened by is the perversion of this discrete freedom.

The gun rights issue is not the only perversion of freedom one can come up with. The whole issue of economic freedom (as defined as freedom from want) is another. One can argue that, in an era of sufficient resources, this should be an undeniable right. Yet, in the United States, economic freedom is defined in

such a way as to satisfy the desires and needs of a particular powerful group. Economic freedom is the freedom of the capitalist to operate within a “free market.” Unfortunately, such a definition, applied in practice, has left many people economically disadvantaged.

As is the case with the issue of gun rights, those who want to alter the definition of economic freedom so as to minimize such conditions as indebtedness and poverty are accused of being socialists and wanting to take away “our freedoms.”

So, really, just what does freedom mean? Well, it means what the powerful and the influential say it means. And, having it manifested in discrete categories makes it easy to customize. Nonetheless, part of civilizational progress is assuring that freedoms are sane and beneficial to larger and larger groups – but, obviously, progress in this sense is a real struggle.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at [www.tothepointanalyses.com](http://www.tothepointanalyses.com).**

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## The Right's Second Amendment Lies

From the Archive: In the wake of the latest gun massacre in the United States, we republish an article by Robert Parry debunking some of the right-wing myths about the Second Amendment that have prevented common sense gun laws.

By Robert Parry ([first published December 21, 2012](#))

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizens-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or



encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison.

The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren't precursors to France's Robespierre or Russia's Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws

anarchy & confusion must prevail.”

Washington’s alarm about Shays’ Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to “We the People” and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

A central point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established society. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment.

Within this framework of a democratic Republic, the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but “domestic Violence,” and treason is one of the few crimes defined in the Constitution as “levying war against” the United States as well as giving “Aid and Comfort” to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

But it was the Constitution’s drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia’s Patrick Henry who denounced the Constitution and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution’s ratification were in such doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison’s political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. [For details, see Robert Parry’s *America’s Stolen Narrative*.]

### **Behind the Second Amendment**

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about “security” and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called “domestic Tranquility.” There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive

alternative.

So, the Second Amendment read: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government. To that end, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked or taken out of context.

This "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's

gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act in their 18<sup>th</sup> Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Framers would have wanted a highly armed population to commit what the Constitution defined as treason against the United States.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## Vietnam's Lessons and the U.S. Culture of Violence

In the wake of another deadly school shooting in Florida, the lessons of past massacres in Vietnam can teach us about U.S. violence and the need to reform unchecked gun culture, discusses Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Back in October 2016 I wrote an analysis entitled "[Are Humans Natural-Born Killers?](#)" It described and commented on research on the origins of human violence published in the science journal *Nature*. The conclusion offered in the

article is that humans come from an evolutionary line that has the capability for violent behavior genetically built into it. It is a reasonable hypothesis. As just about every serious historian knows, the human propensity for lethal violence goes back as far as the evidence can take us – so far that there can be little doubt that this trait is inherited from our pre-human ancestors.

Yet, as the *Nature* scholars also point out, in the case of our species, culture has the ability to “modulate our bloodthirsty tendencies.”

I bring this up now because there is new interest in the slaughter and massacres that took place during the Vietnam War. This may in part be a response to the fact that last month marked the 50th anniversary of that war’s Tet offensive.

America waged war in Vietnam roughly from 1961 to 1975. The starting date is a “rough” one because the United States never actually declared war. In this 14-year span it is generally accepted that the turning point in the struggle came during the Tet offensive of 1968. Tet is the term used for the Vietnamese new year, and that celebratory time in 1968 was when the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong launched attacks in some 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities, in an effort to change the course of the war in their favor.

Though very costly (there were an estimated 50,000 Vietnamese casualties) the offensive worked, at least in the long run. Within a year the United States started a gradual withdrawal from the country. Although the fighting dragged on for another seven years (until the fall of Saigon in 1975) it was Washington’s stubborn search for face-saving terms that largely kept it going.

By the time of the Tet offensive, the war had degenerated into mutual slaughter. The U.S. ended up killing some 3 million Vietnamese, many of them civilians. The massacre at My Lai on 16 March 1968, has often been cited as the “singular” American example of such criminal behavior. It was on this date that a company of soldiers of the 23rd Americal Division murdered, without provocation, 504 peasant villagers of all ages and both sexes.

The massacre itself, and its background year of 1968, have been accurately described in a recent book, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968 and the Descent into Darkness*, by Howard Jones (Oxford University Press, 2017). In turn the book has been expertly reviewed and elaborated upon in the popular *London Review of Books* (LRB) (25 January 2018) by Max Hastings.

It is to be noted that both the publisher and the reviewing magazine are located in the United Kingdom. The reviews of the book offered in the United States have been, to date, in academic journals, including the U.S. Army’s own *Army University Press*. Just about all of them have described Jones’s work as

definitive and a seminal important read. Whether this will translate into public attention in the U.S. is doubtful.

### **Explaining Wartime Massacres**

Modern efforts to explain happenings like the My Lai massacre usually bring up the problem of waging war when it has become hard to know who the enemy is – in other words, when not everyone is wearing a uniform and a lot of resistance is coming from irregular forces. The *Army University Press* review raises this issue.

Another possibility is that such behavior is an “inevitable consequence of combat.” In his *LRB* review, Max Hastings gives a long introductory account of a number of other massacres committed by soldiers in modern times, including in Vietnam. As a consequence one comes away with the feeling that, within a war zone, these criminal acts are almost common.

While it is no doubt true that a combat situation (or perhaps we can say the culture of combat) does raise the probability of massacres, they do not make them “inevitable.” Suggesting that they are, sounds more like an excuse than an explanation. After all, most combat soldiers are not participants in massacres.

This brings us back to the judgment of the research published in *Nature* – we all might well be potential natural born killers who are restrained or encouraged by cultural variables. Within the combat scenario, Hastings suggests that a culture of self-restraint accepted and enforced by the officer corps can forestall mass killings.

This is of particular interest when it comes to the peculiar culture of the United States. In Vietnam many of the massacres (My Lai was by no means unique) were perpetrated by soldiers as well as their officers from the so-called “land of the free.” I use this descriptive term intentionally because one of the things that is often declared to be constitutionally “free” from rational regulation in the U.S. are guns. And, as a consequence, these troops came out of a “gun culture.”

It should be kept in mind that the American gun culture, with its accompanying violence, is not new. The 2014 book *Gun Violence and Public Life* documents this history. If anything has changed from the 1960s to today it is that the public now has access to military grade weapons. What also existed then as now is a culture of bigotry and racism. In the 1960s this was just being confronted by the Civil Rights Movement. It all made for an explosive mix that carried over to influence perceptions of and behavior toward the Vietnamese.

### **Manipulating Culture**

If the *Nature* study's conclusions can be believed, modern violence both of military and civilian origin can be moderated by manipulating culture. In the American case this means overcoming the gun culture as well as racism. There are many ways to do this. It can be done through public education as well as the way a society designs and applies its laws.

However, if any of these approaches to a safer, less violent society is to work, citizens must commit to a consistently enforced, long-term, indeed multi-generational, effort of reform. None of this will happen until politicians and the courts understand the Second Amendment of the Constitution (the present interpretation of which underpins the nation's gun culture) in a more literal and reasonable way. And that won't happen until public opinion overwhelms the ideological rigidity of the U.S. gun lobby.

In the United States the desire for rational reform of the gun laws goes up after each mass shooting and then is stymied by a rigid, but very politically influential, gun lobby. This scenario is part of a "culture war" that is ongoing within the American body politic. It involves not only the issue of gun control but also other issues such as abortion, gay rights, the promotion of racial equality and immigrant rights. So heated is this "culture war" that one might see it as a (so far) non-violent form of civil war.

The lessons of Vietnam, and a greater awareness of the massacres that occurred during this war, speak to the need to reform U.S. culture – to make it less violent and more tolerant. Thus the Vietnam experience should be incorporated into the current debate about guns in America. It would be a major achievement if the 1968 slaughter at My Lai could help stop today's slaughter on the streets of the U.S.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.**

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## Political Fig Leaf After Las Vegas Slaughter

The Las Vegas massacre, like all the other massacres, won't change the easy accessibility of guns in America, but politicians are scrambling to enact a fig-leaf bill against a rapid-fire device used by this one shooter, JP Sottile

explains.

By JP Sottile

Congress' forthcoming "bump stock" bill is the perfect political fig leaf. Cracking down on a simple device that turns deadly weapons even deadlier is an ideal political solve for lawmakers who desperately need to be seen taking some sort of action.

Republicans in particular can embrace this ultimately meaningless move under the guise of actually "doing something" about gun violence in America. And that's why they are embracing it ... it's gun control without controlling guns.

If passed, they can comfortably go into next year's elections inoculated against the charge that they are beholden to the National Rifle Association without actually transgressing the NRA or most gun-owners. In fact, the NRA just announced that *even they* are open to restrictions on bump stocks ... thus inoculating themselves from a potential backlash, too.

So it's a two-fer! But it is only a two-fer for the NRA and their "cash and carry" cadre in Congress. It is a big zero when it comes to the daily grind of American gun violence. It's pure political posturing that will not change anything.

That's because bump stocks have been flying off the shelves for three days ... often selling out in some locations. And bump stocks look like something that could be fashioned by a handy man in a well-stocked shop in a typical suburban garage. Even if someone doesn't have the skill to make one, they'll still be out there. Anyone who really wants one ... will get one ... particularly with millions of bump stocks already sold across America.

Given that stark reality, how will a new restriction functionally eliminate those privately owned bump stocks? And who will be tasked with stopping people from making one or buying one on the black market if they really want to get to the so-called "happy spot" where their already high-powered rifles spit out hundreds of rounds like an open garden hose? How will a new law put that genie back into the bottle?

It's really just an extension of the conundrum around the entire gun issue. It is estimated that Americans own 310 million guns. That's nearly a gun per person. America is locked and loaded. Simply put, this nation, which owns nearly half of the world's civilian-held guns, is a teeming mass of well-armed wannabe actions heroes who believe it is their birthright, and some even believe it's their God-given right, to bear arms.



## No Gun Round-up

There is no chance they'll let go of that Hollywood-primed fantasy or that intoxicating feeling of individual power. And there is no way this country will engage in an Australia-style round-up of guns ... at least, not for another two generations. And we ain't gonna amend the Second Amendment ... at least, not for another two to four generations ... if ever. Let's be honest, it's gonna take a a lot of effort and a long time to stop handing down America's uniquely potent gun-loving gene.

So, it seems like we are stuck. And that's because we are stuck. We have a culture that is suspicious of society and a society that is suspicious of each other. And we are a people who are suspicious of our government, which, it must be pointed out, is really just made up of people. Government is referred to like it is a being ... or a monster ... but it's really just made up of other Americans. Which brings us back around to a growing dysfunction that causes us to fear our neighbors and loathe our fellow Americans. Our distrust of government is intertwined with our distrust of each other. And that's the real reason we like our guns.

Frankly, this Hobbesian dystopia has been the rule in American history. The one blip was the period from the Great Depression through World War II and, with notable exceptions (Jim Crow plus McCarthyism), into the Eisenhower Years. That was a faint glimpse of America as a "whole" people who might be willing to entertain the idea of living in a society.

It was catalyzed by widespread economic hardship, total war and fear of Commies raining down nuclear holocaust on mom, apple pie and Chevrolet. They were tribal reactions to existential fears. But there was also a widely held belief that most Americans were in it together and that government and being a part of society were not inherently bad things. And other Americans were not merely your competition.

Since then, it is has been one long back-slide into the bloody, anti-social norm of American history. This has been the American Way since America's inception. It's been that way since the Whiskey Rebellion and runaway slave patrols and the bugle-tootin' cavalry galloping in to wipe out nettlesome American Indians who dared to get in the way of Manifest Destiny. It's been that way since the Black Wall Street Massacre of 1921. And it returned during the assassinations and chaos of 1968. The only real difference now is the turbo-charged nature of the weapons we wield thanks to the All-American ethos of bigger-faster-cheaper.

Of course we want more firepower with more bullets delivered in less time. That's not just an integral part of America's insatiable consumerism ... it's

just common sense when everyone is armed and everyone is a potential enemy in a nation that looks and feels like one giant O.K. Corral. It's the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy and it ultimately ends up filling morgues with the collateral damage of our damaged culture.

And all the politically easy bump stock bans in the world will not fix that core issue. We are going to keep paying this price until there is a real and lasting change in the way we see each other. Until we are willing to be a part of society ... we will not be able to give up our gun-based culture.

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## How 2nd Amendment Distortions Kill

**Exclusive:** The Las Vegas massacre underscores the intellectual dishonesty of the "gun rights" lobby, which falsifies Second Amendment history and pretends armed citizens could shoot back to stop slaughters, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Many politicians, especially those on the Right, pretend they are strictly adhering to the U.S. Constitution when they often are just making the founding document mean whatever they want – but perhaps nowhere is that as dangerous as with their make-believe Second Amendment.

In the wake of Sunday's mass shooting in Las Vegas – where one individual firing from a high-rise hotel murdered 58 people and wounded more than 500 at a country music festival – we are told that the reason the United States can't do anything to stop this sort of carnage is the Second Amendment's "right to bear arms."

"Gun rights" advocates insist that pretty much any gun control violates the design of the Constitution's Framers and thus can't be enacted no matter how many innocent people die.

Some on the Right, as well as some on the Left, even claim that the Founders, as revolutionaries themselves, wanted an armed population so the people could rebel against the Republic, which the U.S. Constitution created. But the Constitution's Framers in 1787 and the authors of the Bill of Rights in the First Congress in 1789 had no such intent.

Arguably other individuals disconnected from the drafting of those documents may have harbored such radical attitudes (at least rhetorically), but the authors didn't. In fact, their intent was the opposite.

The goal of the Second Amendment was to promote state militias for the maintenance of order at a time of political unrest, potential slave revolts and simmering hostilities with both European powers and Native Americans on the frontiers. Indeed, the amendment's defined purpose was to achieve state "security" against disruptions to the country's new republican form of government.

The Second Amendment reads: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

In other words, if read in context, it's clear that the Second Amendment was enacted so each state would have the specific right to form "a well-regulated militia" to maintain "security," i.e., to put down armed disorder and protect its citizens.

In the late Eighteenth Century, the meaning of "bearing" arms also referred to a citizen being part of a militia or army. It didn't mean that an individual had the right to possess whatever number of high-capacity killing machines that he or she might want. Indeed, the most lethal weapon that early Americans owned was a slow-loading, single-fired musket or rifle.

## **No Anarchists**

Further to the point, both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were the work of the Federalists, who – at the time – counted James Madison among their ranks.

And whatever one thinks about the Federalists, who often are criticized as elitists, they were the principal constitutional Framers and the leaders of the First Congress. They constituted the early national establishment, people such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris and Madison.

The Federalists feared that their new creation, a constitutional republic in an age of monarchies, was threatened by the potential for violent chaos, which is what European aristocrats predicted for the new United States. Democracy was a largely untested concept that was believed likely to fall victim to demagoguery and factionalism.

So, the Framers sought a political system that reflected the will of the citizens (the House of Representatives) but within a framework that constrained public passions (the Senate and other checks and balances). In other words, the

Constitution sought to channel political disputes into non-violent competition among various interests, not into armed rebellions against the government.

The Framers also recognized how fragile the nation's independence was and how domestic rebellions could be exploited by European powers. Indeed, one of the crises that led to the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787 was the inability of the old system under the Articles of Confederation to put down Shays's Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786-87. Washington saw the possible hand of British agents.

So, the Federalists were seeking a structure that would ensure "domestic Tranquility," as they explained in the Constitution's Preamble. They did not want endless civil strife.

The whole idea of the Constitution – with its mix of voting (at least by some white male citizens), elected and appointed representatives, and checks and balances – was to create a political structure that made violence unnecessary.

So, it should be obvious even without knowing all the history that the Framers weren't encouraging violent uprisings against the Republic that they were founding. To the contrary, they characterized violence against the constitutional system as "treason" in Article III, Section 3. They also committed the federal government to protect each state from "domestic Violence," in Article IV, Section 4.

### **Putting Down Rebellion**

One of the first uses of the new state militias formed under the Second Amendment and the Militia Acts, which required able-bodied men to report for duty with their own muskets, was for President Washington to lead a federalized force of militiamen against the Whiskey Rebellion, a tax revolt in western Pennsylvania in 1794.

In the South, one of the principal reasons for a militia was to rally armed whites to put down slave uprisings. On the frontier, militias fought against Native Americans over land. Militias also were called up to fight the British in the War of 1812.

But you don't have to like or dislike how the Second Amendment and the Militia Acts were used to recognize how the Framers intended these legislative provisions to be used.

The Second Amendment was meant to maintain public order, even an unjust order, rather than to empower the oppressed to take up arms against the government. That latter idea was a modern reinterpretation, a distortion of the history.

The revisionists who have transformed the meaning of the Second Amendment love to cite provocative comments by Thomas Jefferson, such as a quote from a 1787 letter criticizing the Constitution for its commander-in-chief provisions.

Jefferson argued that violence, like Shays's Rebellion, should be welcomed. He wrote, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its [sic] natural manure."

Jefferson, of course, was a world-class hypocrite who rarely believed what he was saying or writing. He crafted noble words, like "all men are created equal, ... endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," but he was a major slaveholder who raped at least one and likely more slave girls and had slave boys whipped.

He also was never willing to risk his own blood as that "natural manure" of liberty. During the Revolutionary War when Benedict Arnold led a force of Loyalists against Richmond, Jefferson, who was then Virginia's governor, fled the capital. Later, when British cavalry approached Charlottesville and his home of Monticello, Gov. Jefferson again took flight.

But more to the point, Jefferson was not a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, nor was he in the First Congress, which produced the Second Amendment. In other words, it's a historical error to cite Jefferson in any way as speaking authoritatively about what the Framers intended with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. He was not directly involved in either.

## **A Collective Right**

The real history of the Second Amendment was well understood both by citizens and courts in the generations after the Constitution and Bill of Rights were enacted. For most of the years of the Republic, the U.S. Supreme Court interpreted the Second Amendment as a collective right, allowing Americans to participate in a "well-regulated Militia," not an individual right to buy the latest weaponry at a gun show or stockpile a military-style arsenal in the basement.

It's true that many Americans owned a musket or rifle in those early years especially on the frontier, but regulations on munitions were still common in cities where storing of gunpowder, for instance, represented a threat to the public safety.

As the nation spread westward, so did common-sense restrictions on gun violence. Sheriffs in some of the wildest of Wild West towns enforced gun bans that today would prompt a recall election financed by the National Rifle Association.

However, in recent decades – understanding the power of narrative on the human imagination – a resurgent American Right (and some on the Left) rewrote the history of the Founding era, dispatching “researchers” to cherry-pick or fabricate quotes from Revolutionary War leaders to create politically convenient illusions. [See, for instance, Steven Krulik’s compilation of apocryphal or out-of-context gun quotes.]

That bogus history gave rise to the image of the Framers as wild-eyed radicals – Leon Trotskys of the Eighteenth Century – encouraging armed rebellion against their own Republic. Rather than people who believed in the rule of law and social order, the Framers were contorted into crazies who wanted citizens to be empowered to shoot American police, soldiers, elected representatives and government officials as agents of “tyranny.”

This false history was advanced particularly by the American Right in the last half of the Twentieth Century as a kind of neo-Confederate call to arms, with the goal of rallying whites into a near-insurrectionary fury particularly in the South but also in rural areas of the North and West.

In the 1950s and 1960s, some white Southerners fancied themselves an armed resistance against the tyrannical federal government as it enforced laws on racial integration and other supposed infringements on “states’ rights.” In the 1990s, armed “citizens militias” began to pop up in reaction to the election of Democrat Bill Clinton, culminating in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1994.

While designed primarily for the weak-minded, the Right’s faux Founding history also had an impact on right-wing “intellectuals” including Republican lawyers who worked their way up through the federal judiciary under Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and now Donald Trump.

By 2008, these right-wing jurists held a majority on the U.S. Supreme Court and could thus overturn generations of legal precedents and declare that the Second Amendment established an individual right for Americans to own guns. Though even these five right-wing justices accepted society’s right to protect the general welfare of the population through some gun control, the Supreme Court’s ruling effectively “validated” the Right’s made-up history.

The ruling created a political dynamic to which even liberals in national politics – the likes of Barack Obama and Joe Biden – had to genuflect, the supposed Second Amendment right of Americans to parade around in public with guns on their hips and high-powered semi-automatic rifles slung over their shoulders.

**What the Framers Wanted?**

As guns-right activists struck down gun regulations in Congress and in statehouses across the nation, their dominant argument was that the Second Amendment offered no leeway for restrictions on gun ownership; it's what the Framers wanted.

So, pretty much any unstable person could load up with a vast killing capacity and slouch off to a bar, to a work place, to a church, to a school or to a high-rise Las Vegas hotel and treat fellow Americans as targets in a real-life violent video game. Somehow, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness was overtaken by the "right" to own an AR-15 with a 30-or-100-bullet magazine.

When right-wing politicians talk about the Second Amendment now, they don't even bother to include the preamble that explains the point of the amendment. The entire amendment is only 26 words. But the likes of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, find the preamble inconvenient because it would undercut their false storyline. So they just lop off the first 12 words.

Nor do they explain what the Framers meant by "bear arms." The phrase reflected the reasoning in the Second Amendment's preamble that the whole point was to create "well-regulated" state militias to maintain "security," not to free up anybody with a beef to kill government officials or citizens of a disapproved race or creed or just random folks.

So, even after the massacre of 20 first-graders and six educators in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012, Fox News personality Andrew Napolitano declared: "The historical reality of the Second Amendment's protection of the right to keep and bear arms is not that it protects the right to shoot deer. It protects the right to shoot tyrants, and it protects the right to shoot at them effectively, with the same instruments they would use upon us."

At the time, the clear message from the Right was that armed Americans must confront the "tyrannical" Barack Obama, the twice-elected President of the United States (and the first African-American to hold that office) especially if he pressed ahead seeking common-sense gun restrictions. But Napolitano was simply wrong on the history.

Another dubious argument from the gun-rights lobby was that armed citizens could take down a gunman and thus stop a mass shooting before it became a full-fledged massacre.

But a gunfight among largely untrained civilians would likely add to the slaughter, not stop it. For instance, a 2012 mass shooting occurred in a darkened theater in Aurora, Colorado. Does anyone logically think that a bunch

of terrified gun carriers exchanging fire in such a situation – not knowing who the original shooter was – would solve the problem?

And how about Sunday's massacre in Las Vegas where the shooter positioned himself on the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel and fired down on a packed concert venue, a substantial distance away?

Assuming that the concertgoers were armed and tried to defend themselves, they would likely have ended up shooting other innocent concertgoers because of the initial confusion as to where the shooter was positioned. That would have further complicated the challenge to police who could have mistakenly opened fire on armed people in the crowd rather than locate and stop the original killer as he kept firing from his sniper's perch. In other words, the horrific death toll could have been even higher.

To pretend that such carnage was the intent of the Constitution's Framers, who wrote about achieving "domestic Tranquility," or the goal of the First Congress, which drafted the Second Amendment to promote "the security of a free State," is intellectually dishonest and a true threat to the lives of American citizens.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## America Not Immune from Chaos

"Exceptional" America views itself as largely immune from devastating storms and the violence that infect much of the world, but recent weeks show that there is no protection against natural and human catastrophes, writes Ann Wright.

By Ann Wright

Over the past two months – between natural disasters and the actions of a heavily armed gunman firing from a high-rise hotel – citizens of the United States have faced the kind of havoc and violence that people in other parts of the world have been enduring routinely.

Sunday night's mass shooting in Las Vegas killed 59 and left more than 500 wounded. In previous weeks, American citizens have faced loss of life and massive property damage in Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin



Islands from Hurricanes Maria, Irma and Harvey.

Of course, other places in the Caribbean suffered their own devastating blows from these major hurricanes: Cuba, Barbuda, Dominica, Antigua, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos, British Virgin Island, St. Martin, Monserrat, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts and Nevis.

In other parts of the world, one-third of Bangladesh has been under water from monsoon rains; parts of Nigeria have been flooded; Mexico has endured killer earthquakes.

And then there is the politically driven violence, such as is occurring in Burma/Myanmar with Rahingya villages burned, thousands murdered, and over 400,000 people fleeing into Bangladesh to escape Buddhist Burmese/Myanmar military attacks.

There is also the seemingly endless devastation from wars waged or encouraged by U.S. policymakers. People in Afghanistan have been enduring war and destruction for 16 years; in Iraq for 13 years; and in Syria for five years.

Afghan, Pakistani, Somali, Iraqi, Syrian and Yemeni civilians have been murdered by U.S. killer drones whose pilots, ironically, are trained 60 miles from Las Vegas, raining hellfire missiles from above in the same sort of sudden violence as people in Las Vegas suffered Sunday night.

Americans are now face-to-face with the human and environmental violence that many parts of the world have experienced albeit with those stories confined to briefs packages on the back pages of U.S. newspapers.

So, in just the past month or so, Americans have been shocked by the ravages of gun violence inflicted by a committed sniper and the violence of nature's environmental reaction to global warming made worse by careless human behavior releasing carbon dioxide and other pollutants into the atmosphere.

U.S. wars killing people around the world and the glorification of this organized violence as an answer to geopolitical problems can't help but influence the thinking of some troubled individuals who may see random violence as the answer to their own personal problems. Easy access to guns in the United States is simply out of control.

Yet, corporate lobbying and political pressures have encouraged Congress and the Trump administration to deny both the connection between the accessibility of powerful weapons and mass shootings and between the burning of fossil fuels and global warming.

But it turns out that this refusal to face difficult realities will not shield Americans from horrific consequences. America will not be “exceptional” in the sense of having special exemption from the destructive forces unleashed upon the world whether by war and violence or by environmental degradation.

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## Institutional Factors in US Violence

The pervasive violence in American society is driven by many factors, including easy access to firearms and Hollywood’s glorification of killing, but there are also institutional factors, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is a lot of violence in the United States, and if you look at the news it appears that things are getting worse. The nation is armed to the teeth, which means that any out-of-control angry person can vent in lethal fashion. Or, maybe they can choose to vent in the European style by using their car as a battering ram.

There is much head shaking about this nationwide violence and much wondering about its sources. The usual explanation assigns blame to the “bad apples.” That is, all these people acting out violently are somehow unstable. The fault lies with the individual, and this can be seen in their inability to contain their rage. If there is a broader influence it has to be some foreign agency (this used to be Communism but now is said to be Islam) urging them on through a subtle process of radicalization. This is thought to be one way good apples go bad.

But why limit blame to unstable personalities or shadowy alien forces? Our homebred culture acts as the context for a citizen’s behavior, suggesting to them what is allowable and what is not. In the U.S., with its almost nonexistent gun laws, its fundamentalist religious ideas, its rampant Islamophobia, its prevailing white-backlash politics, and its media entertainment industry heavily reliant on virtual violence, there is apparently some confusion as to what is and isn’t permissible.

Under these circumstances it is quite possible that at least some manifestations of our own culture have the potential of serving as contaminating agents for otherwise upright citizens. Contamination here means turning those citizens into violent agents – little ticking time bombs.

### **Cultural Corruption**

What aspects of U.S. culture could serve this corrupting function? Well there are those mentioned above plus the superheated patriotic environments of thousands of VFW lodges, defensive attitudes and behavior of police fraternal leagues, the motorcycle clubs where flying three-foot-long American flags from your fender is de rigueur, and last but not least the environment of your typical Trump rally.

However, these cultural centers of resentment and anger are only occasional producers of public violence. There are other very common culturally contaminating sources that actually supply consistent venues for bringing out the worst in many of us.

These are institutions that are hardly noticed by the public and yet are turning thousands of American citizens (mostly young men) into battered, harassed, and humiliated individuals, some of whom will then turn into batterers, harassers and humiliators themselves. Some of them will make this corrupting experience the basis for lifelong friendships. Some will see these activities as integral to their “glory days.”

Here are two examples, and ironically, both are part of institutions that purport to be a source of the nation’s highest values – educational institutions and military institutions

### **The Campus-Based Fraternity**

In the region of the United States where I live, one of the largest universities is called Penn State. “Penn” stands for Pennsylvania, and it is among this state’s oldest and most respected institutions. Like many other universities and colleges, though, Penn State is a home to a large number of fraternities. Fraternities are largely self-governing male clubs or associations that are supposed to provide camaraderie for their members. Originally, they were seen as organizations that “ennobled” their members and aided in their education.

Today, most fraternities are boys clubs that all too often operate as if the fraternal group is bound only by its own traditions rather than societal norms. Among those traditions are regularly drinking oneself into a stupor and emotionally and sometimes physically “hazing” those “pledging” the fraternity.

Pledging means going through the process prescribed for membership. At the core of this process is the systematic demeaning or embarrassing of the pledges for set period of time. The rationale behind this behavior is that “hazing” transforms the “pledge class” into a unified “band of brothers.” Overall the process weakens individuality and independent judgment.

Most members of fraternities range from 17 to 21 years of age. At this point I would remind the reader that the frontal cortex, that part of the brain that provides “executive function” or control for behavior, does not fully mature until one’s mid-twenties.

What are you likely to get when you put together an immature constituency and the sort of organizational traditions described above? Well, on Feb. 4 at the Penn State fraternity Beta Theta Pi, you got the wrongful death of a 19-year-old pledge.

Many men whose own youth have been tied to fraternities dismiss such an event as too rare to be significant. But is that so? Between the year 2000 and December 2014 there were 57 deaths due to hazing at U.S. colleges. This activity is prevalent enough, and dangerous enough, that presently 44 states have enacted some form of anti-hazing statutes.

Under the circumstances, Jason Brennan, professor of ethics and public policy at Georgetown University, is right when he observes that “as a matter of fact fraternities don’t educate and ennoble; they stultify and corrupt.” How so? They allow you to see cruelty as an important and functional part of a “normal” social process. They allow you the opportunity to decide if you like being cruel or not.

### **The Military’s “Basic Training”**

In what other major organization do you find hazing? The answer is in the U.S. military. It is used during basic training. According to a study appearing in the American Medical Association’s Journal of Ethics appearing March 2014, “there is a long history of *sanctioned abuse* of new recruits by their drill instructors during entry training.” Such behavior is particularly characteristic of the Army and the Marines. Officially, the military now regards this form of hazing as “cruel and unnecessary” and “inconsistent with its core institutional values.” However, this is probably more recruiting propaganda rather than a statement of real change.

According to the military-associated website Task and Purpose, recruits are still subject to periodic “shark attacks,” which means being “harassed and harangued” and having instilled in them “the fear factor.” These are still the

means by which “the whole discipline process” is created.

Traditionally, the military sees hazing as serving three purposes: (1) it weeds out those “unfit or unwilling to serve”; (2) it allegedly destroys the civilian “principles and norms” of the new recruits so that they can be replaced by those of the military organization; and (3) it allegedly builds “cohesion” among the recruits. Numbers 1 and 3 also apply to the hazing process of fraternities.

### **Hazing and Cultural Deterioration**

The rationale behind hazing is to destroy pre-existing “values and habits” through a process of abuse so that they can be replaced by new “values and habits.” For fraternities the new value structure is relatively benign, going little beyond a sense of “brotherhood” and “old boy’” camaraderie that is supposed to last well beyond one’s college years. It is an elitist message but not one that risks widespread cultural deterioration.

For the military the goal is not benign at all. It is no less than the destruction of the recruit’s individuality and habit of independent thinking. The desired restructured individual is one that takes orders unquestioningly and functions as part of a cadre rather than an individual. This is an undeniably anti-democratic process, the effectiveness of which contributes to the difficulty of many veterans to reintegrate back into civilian life. At the same time, “boot camp” seeks to raise the violence potential of the recruit.

We cannot overemphasize the fact that in both cases the institutionalized methodology for the development of an alleged new outlook among millions of citizens is harassment and abuse. No society that allows such processes to go on in some of its most important culture-shaping institutions can hope to remain mentally healthy.

In today’s America, there seems to be a deep-seated restlessness. With a nearly open access to all manner of weapons and a history of racial discrimination, labor exploitation, and external aggression, what passes for cultural normality is continuously punctuated by episodes of violence. When considering this, one must face up to the fact that it is to violence that millions of citizens are being acculturated in both college fraternities and military training. These experiences must be judged as contributing factors to a process of cultural deterioration.

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