

Behind Another Rampage Massacre

Exclusive: Work-place and college-campus slaughters have become a regular feature of America's harsh economic landscape the past few decades, as Ayn Rand-style policies sharply divide the nation into a few heroic "winners" and many hapless "losers," a factor Mark Ames examines in the latest college bloodbath.

By Mark Ames

I was working on an article about last month's rampage massacre in Afghanistan that left 17 villagers dead, when news hit of this past Monday's massacre at an Oakland, California, religious college, leaving seven dead. In both cases, the shooters survived and face a possible death penalty, which is rare: Usually these rampage killings end with self-inflicted bullet in the mouth.

These "going postal" rampage killings like the one that just took place at the Oikos University campus so often and with such relentless rhythm, a lot of people might easily assume that these mass-shootings at American schools and workplaces have always been with us.

It's not true, of course, as I wrote in my book *Going Postal: Rage, Murder and Rebellion*, it's an exclusively American phenomenon specific to our time. The first post office rampage killing took place in Edmond, Oklahoma, in the mid-1980s, at the height of the Reagan Revolution's war on the American worker.

Those post office massacres quickly migrated into private workplace massacres by the end of the 1980s, where they've become a regular rhythmic staple of our murder culture ever since and from the adult workplace, the massacres migrated to our schools.

We've had mass-killings before; and every now and then, you'll read about a rampage killing in some other country. But only in America, and only since the mid-1980s, do American employees attack their own workplaces and offices, and middle-class students attack their own schools, with such consistency, year after year.

It was only after the crash in 2008 that some Americans began to accept the obvious: That the cruelty, predation and concentration of wealth and power introduced by the Reagan Revolution sparked a new type of murder that has more in common with insurgency violence or rebellious peasant violence than, say, the psychopathology of a serial murder.

Like so many school rampage killers, last Monday's alleged murderer, One L. Goh, was reportedly bullied and mistreated at his nursing school program at the small

Korean Christian nursing program he enrolled in. Bullying also was blamed for the high school rampage killing a few weeks ago in suburban Cleveland that left three students dead and five wounded.

The gruesome details about the way Goh is said to have lined up and executed his victims, the way he apparently singled out women, make hard not to caricature him as a monster, a demonic psychopath, and yet, without excusing Goh's killings, one should try to make sense of what happened to him, the downward-trending bleakness, the slow water-torture of low-five-figure debts, the broken marriage, the \$23,000 tax bill owed to the IRS.

Losing Hope

In the Naughts, One L. Goh helped run a construction company. But construction collapsed as an industry in 2006-7; and unless you were Countrywide Financial CEO Angelo Mozillo, you'd have nothing to show for the few good years.

In late 2007, Goh moved into the Yorkview Apartments complex in Hayes, Virginia, a bleak, prefab looking structure in a rural corner of Virginia. By the following summer, One L. Goh found himself unable to cover his \$575 rent payment two months in a row. He was evicted; but before they evicted him, creditors took his car

The future rampage-murderer took it all stoically, even politely, according to one of Goh's apartment complex neighbors, Thomas Lumpkin. Goh "was always neat, wore nice clothes," Lumpkin said. "You would never expect it out of him. He just don't seem like that type of person."

Lumpkin also recalled the day Lumpkin was evicted, saw his Nissan pickup repossessed and departed by cab. I tried to imagine what that cab ride felt like for One L. Goh, a pudgy 40-something Korean-American dweeb, stewing with resentment, in his nice neat clothes. How far did he go in that cab, and where to?

Eventually he wound up with his father on the West Coast. Goh's father lives in an Oakland housing project for senior citizens run by a Christian non-profit. Goh found work in a San Mateo warehouse, he doubled as a mover.

It's not a good place to be if you're a middle-aged failure: San Francisco has so much obscene wealth, and smug beauty, to be a fat 40-something nerd working with your father in a grocery store in Daly City, in the shadow of San Francisco, is some kind of Hell, a Hell for failures.

And then last year, Goh's brother, an Iraq War veteran and Special Forces hero, died in a freak car accident when his Toyota slammed head-on at 70 mpg into a

“multi-ton” boulder lying on a Virginia road. The photos of the accident scene look almost unreal, almost staged. The news was a blow to One L. Goh’s mother; she died within a few months after the brother.

This is the backdrop to Goh’s fateful decision to pull himself out of a years-long rut, and to start a new career for himself as a nurse. It may have been the shock of the back-to-back deaths in the family, or maybe it was his father who encouraged him, or the experience of living with his father in a building for the elderly.

Whatever the case, his widower father supported his son with a \$6,000 loan to pay for the vocational nursing school tuition. But after a few months, One L. Goh was out of the program, bitter and vengeful, dead set on murder; and his father was out \$6,000, thanks to his son’s bad bet.

Ignition to a Massacre

What set Goh off? Why did he leave the nursing school so early? Most reports say he was teased by his classmates for his age, 43, and his accent. Which is odd, considering most of the students are foreigners and Koreans.

(Another Korean-American rampage-killer was teased over his voice: Virginia Tech killer Cho Seung-Hui. As another Virginia Tech student told reporters back in 2007, “As soon as [Cho] started reading, the whole class started laughing and pointing and saying, ‘Go back to China.’”)

Goh enrolled in what must have been one of the very worst nursing programs in the entire state of California: the vocational nursing program at Oikos University, a fundamentalist Korean-American Christian school in Oakland.

The school’s nursing program is accredited, which is important of course if you want your for-profit school program to make money. To comply with the accreditation, Oikos U. had provide a “2010 Performance Sheet” summing up its students’ performances both on the national nursing exam and, once licensed, in the job market.

The “performance” is abysmal, to the point where you almost wonder if it’s even statistically possible to fail as spectacularly as Oikos University’s nursing students. Of the programs 28 graduates from the Spring 2010 2011 term, only 11 of those 28 managed to pass the national nursing exam. That’s a 29 percent pass rate, almost unheard of.

According to a spokesman for the California Department of Consumer Affairs, it makes Oikos among the state’s very worst programs, the average success rate for graduates of other programs is 75 percent. (An Oakland Tribune article puts

Oikos U's exam pass rate at 41 percent of students who took the test, but the actual Performance Sheet gives a lower 29 percent pass figure, either way, both are awful).

Oikos University failed to prepare its students for the test, and it failed those who passed when they turned to the job market. According to the same Performance Sheet, of the school's 11 students who passed the exam, eight found paying jobs as nurses, with salaries ranging as low as \$5,000 per year to the one lucky top salary earner who earned up to \$35,000. That's in the Bay Area, the most expensive region in America.

In sum: One L. Goh could not have chosen a worse nursing program to pin his personal hopes on. This nursing program was all but guaranteed to fail him.

Fundamentalist Mission

One thing Oikos University does fairly convincingly is fundamentalist evangelical Christianity for Korean-Americans. Students at Oikos U. are required to attend regular church services; the pious language of evangelical Christianity frames everything.

The school's president, Rev. Jongkin Kim, says his goal is "to foster spiritual Christian leaders who abide by God's intentions and to expand God's nation through them." Under the university's "Our Vision" it reads:

"The vision of Oikos University is to educate emerging Christian leaders to transform and bless the world at every level from the church and local community levels to the realm of world entire."

And then there's the reality, revealed in a lawsuit filed last month by a former staffer of Oikos University named Jong Cha, who says the school cheated her out of \$75,000 in salary and expenses, and stiffed her on a \$10,000 loan that she personally gave to the Christian college in 2008.

Viewed from this angle, One L. Goh might have come to the conclusion at some point that he'd taken scarce funds from his poor old widower father, and handed it over to religious hucksters running the Golden State's worst nursing program.

One thing to keep in mind here: It's easy to see why Oikos University introduced a nursing vocational program. If you get it accredited, these nursing programs are guaranteed cash-cows. Most of the big for-profit education predators like Kaplan Inc. (which owns, and subsidizes, the Washington Post) are in on the vocational nursing for-profit gig.

You can charge students insane tuitions, hire hacks as teachers, pocket the

difference, and dump the unpaid loans on the government in exchange for 100 cents on the dollar.

The Reverend who founded Oikos University certainly understood this, his good friend told the New York Times that Rev. Kim “had established the nursing school to support the school’s department of religion.” The cash must have rolled in quickly, because within a year after launching its nursing program, Oikos doubled its size, meaning doubling revenues.

And yet even with all those new revenues coming in, the school couldn’t figure out a way to raise its graduates’ test results out of the failure category. The school appears to have stiffed one of its top staffers out of her pay and her loan, suggesting, in the words of the Oakland Tribune, “that the school may have fallen on hard times.”

I wonder if this is what set off One L. Goh a few months after he enrolled, the realization that he’d been fleeced, that he enrolled in the wrong program on his father’s money. The year 2011 had already taken his brother and his mother.

A Dashed Last Hope

There is something in between the lines that suggests his plan to become a nurse, worked out with his father’s assistance a kind of desperate last attempt to turn everything around in the proverbial One Bold Swoop.

He would do something practical, and morally good, helping the elderly, people like his father, and earn a steady income that would allow him, at last, some dignity and some chance to start paying off his debts.

It was as though Goh pinned everything on this plan to reinvent himself as a nurse, and according to all our cultural propaganda, all the Hollywood movies and newspaper bromides, Goh would be rewarded for undertaking this self-transformation. It was guaranteed to change everything.

And for a brief while last year, Goh’s mood was transformed, he really did think he had a great future ahead of him. One of Goh’s former employers at a food warehouse described Goh as “upbeat” when he ran into him last year in Oakland, a change from the usually quiet, sullen Goh he’d known.

This new “upbeat” One L. Goh boasted to his former employer “about how he had returned to school to become a nurse and help elderly people.”

The idea that you can reinvent yourself, that your fate is in your own hands, that you have the power inside of you to make yourself a winner (and if you fail, it’s all your own fault), this may be America’s most toxic cultural snake-

oil. And yet it never fails to find takers.

Of course, nothing changed, except that Goh had been conned out of his dad's money. As his former employer put it: "Not many people go back to school at that age. He was trying something new and it wasn't working."

It didn't take long for him to figure it out. Just a few months after enrolling, One L. Goh dropped out of the Oikos University program. When he dropped out of the program, he asked them to refund his father's \$6,000 that he paid for tuition. He was denied. He fought with the administrators, but they didn't budge. This was what made him snap.

The administrator, whom Goh fought with for his tuition refund and whom he came to kill that day, has now come forward. Her name is Ellen Cervellon. She was gone on the day of the massacre because she also teaches nursing to students at California State University at East Bay.

Now she will have to wonder, why didn't she just approve the refund to a desperate man? What if she had approved it? Her argument was that he'd already spent several months in the program. According to a friend of Ellen Cervellon's, Linda Music, she even denied Goh his last reasonable request, to prorate the refund.

As Matthai Kuruvila reported at SFGate.com, Goh had asked Ellen Cervellon for a full refund of his tuition and when he was denied suggested prorating the tuition refund. Cervellon said no, Music said.

That meant he threw his father's money away: He had nothing to show for the \$6,000 given to the university; he would never be able to pay his father back; and he would never be able to borrow a sum like that from him again. That was it, the final act. The jig was up for him.

Lack of Empathy

Why? Why couldn't Cervellon meet this desperate failure half-way? What was in it for Cervellon? What's with the Ayn Randian lack of empathy in this country among the non-oligarchy caste?

Cervellon seems to be asking herself this same question: "In talking to several of the students and faculty who were there, I think he was looking for me. I have that weight on my shoulders and I don't know what to do with it,"

School officials have been painting a portrait of One L. Goh as a psycho and a freak, using phrases like "behavioral problems" and calling him "angry" and

“paranoid.” There must be truth to that; nice, normal people in a healthy state of mind don’t rampage-massacre others.

But the intended target, Ellen Cervellon, disputes that: “He was never forced out, he showed no behavioral problems, and he was never asked to leave the program. He decided on his own to leave the program.”

The depressingly familiar dead-end life that One L. Goh found himself in, surrounded by petty scams as revealed in the ex-staffer’s lawsuit and the bleak performance of the school’s graduates, combined with the back-to-back deaths of two family members, could make a lot of sane people desperate and enraged and suicidal. Not to mention the larger context of an inequality-ravaged America where opportunity and dignity are scarcer and scarcer.

On top of all this, as he complained often, students at the nursing program wouldn’t talk to him. That could be traumatizing even under better circumstances, but under his conditions, being mocked and ignored by fellow fundamentalist Christians for being an aging loser, would be devastating.

One of Goh’s teachers continued criticizing Goh even after the massacre: “I always advised him, ‘You go to school to learn, not to make friends.’” More great advice from the Oikos University folks.

After quitting the nursing program, One L. Goh spent the last few months working with his father at the Daly City supermarket. He was back at square one: A failure, swindled, condemned to work in a shitty job beside his struggling father whom he’d let down.

You might say that One L. Goh snapped because for once, he saw things as they really were, stripped of hope, stripped of fantasies about self-improvement or self-transformation.

He failed at everything; he was one of those faceless, anonymous losers. But there was one thing he could still excel at, something that could get him attention, something that this country perversely celebrates: mass murder in a blaze of anti-glory. So long as you’re ready to make that transformation-of-character into a death row inmate, that option is always available here.

Last Monday, according to police accounts, One L. Goh armed himself with a .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol and showed up at the Oikos school for his final act. But the plan failed from the start: The administrator he was after was gone. So the target became the entire setting, Oikos University, as it so often happens in these “going postal” rampage killings.

There’s a section on the Oikos University website about the 11 beliefs that the

University holds to, they call it their “Doctrinal Statement” and it’s the last belief, Number 11, that sums up the malevolence of it all:

“We believe in the existence of a personal, malevolent being called Satan who acts as tempter and accuser, for whom the place of eternal punishment was prepared, where all who die outside of Christ shall be confined in conscious torment for eternity.”

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