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Youth violence requires broad approach

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

No one cause or solution can be highlighted in cases such as the Thurston shooting

The storm is passing. With a tremendous roar, the national media and the pundits they like to quote descended May 21 upon Springfield, drenching us with their vision of the "big story." Not to be left behind, local media responded in kind — The Register-Guard still dedicates four or five stories each day to the "Thurston tragedy."

Now that they're gone and the collective wisdom of every hack advocate and lobbyist has departed with them, maybe we can finally think about the situation with a clear head. What an unusual approach that would be.

We don't know what would make a student kill his parents, carry three guns to school, and begin shooting random people eating breakfast in the cafeteria. More important, our desire to explain the shooting is limited.

The violent events at Thurston are tremendously significant to the community, and many people in the area are probably asking themselves, their families and their children some critical questions about personal views and behaviors. As a newspaper, however, it isn't our job to dissect every aspect of this particular case or community.

What concerns us is what makes this case truly upsetting — not that it was a stunning and rare event that briefly brought the attention of the nation's media to Eugene — but that it was part of a common and dangerous trend of youth violence.

This violence isn't isolated to the schoolyard and it usually doesn't receive more than a passing mention in the press. For every Thurston shooting, there are dozens of young people who die in the inner city.

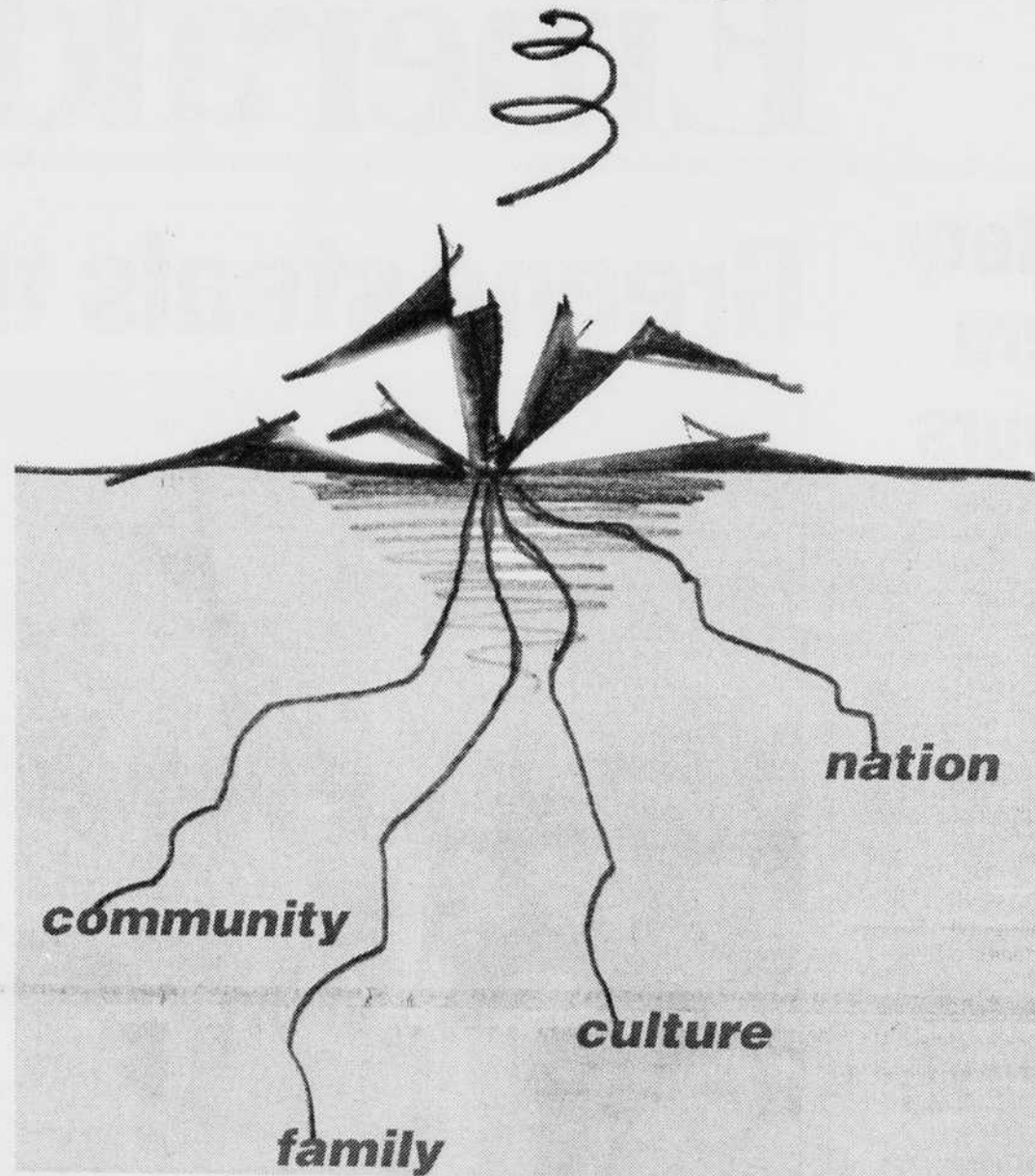
Even as crime rates decline across the nation, levels of youth violence continue to rise. There are many people who are interested in explaining this, and those people were out in full force during the media storm surrounding the Thurston shooting.

It shouldn't take an event such as Thurston for the media to ask for explanations for youth violence. Conversely, people shouldn't rely on events such as Thurston as an excuse to provide explanations.

Too many of those explanations had little or nothing to do with the specifics of Thurston. While we cannot view the events in Springfield as isolated, it's important to recognize that there are aspects of the shooting that are unique to the individuals involved and the community they live in.

Those unique aspects were largely ignored by the pundits who weighed in with their profound understanding of why violence happens. Instead, every person had an agenda that went along with his or her answer.

Some of those agendas are admirable. The shootings could not have happened had the suspect not had easy access to a gun, as gun control advocates are keen to point out. But the gun didn't leap into someone's hand and start firing itself — it took a



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

combination of other factors to pull the trigger.

Even those groups we support do themselves and the anti-violence cause a disservice by making Thurston into little more than an opportunity for an advocacy lecture. Gun control, improved schools and stronger communities are important for stopping all violence, but none of these factors alone or in combination can adequately explain what happened in Springfield.

When advocates rely on isolated events such as Thurston to push their agendas, the debate over youth violence becomes distorted. The majority of violent juvenile crime happens in cities and yet rarely is mentioned. Effective policies for dealing with this crime need to be formed based upon an overall view of the situation, rather than the advocates' gut reactions to a media-saturated event.

We certainly don't claim to know what the best approach to solving juvenile crime is, but

we do know it will require a combination of many approaches, most of which will have to be tailored to the community where they are implemented. Many of the people who threw out explanations for Thurston made valuable points, but those points are only really valuable when taken in combination with the dozens of other explanations.

Dealing with violence requires an understanding of the problem not as consisting of isolated incidents stemming from isolated causes, but rather as a complex pattern of societal discord that has roots in many underlying problems at the individual, community, family, cultural and national levels.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Thumbs



TO A STUDY INDICATING INCREASING SUPPORT OF GAYS:

According to a story in The Register-Guard, only 56 percent of people disapprove of homosexuality, down from more than 70 percent mere decades ago. While that number should be zero, we are still glad to see indications that Americans are becoming more intelligent, at least on this subject. Also significant, support for many homosexual causes, such as same-sex marriage and domestic partner benefits, is also increasing. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in this case, like many in America, the majority continues to hold a bigoted hatred of that which is different. We must continue fighting for equality.



TO GENDER EQUALITY IN HEALTH CARE:

As was pointed out in The Register-Guard a few weeks ago, medicine continues to be a man's world. The latest indication of this is Viagra: The New York Times reported on Thursday that federal health insurance programs will pay for the anti-impotence pill. Meanwhile, as the Guard story noted, health care services that are important to women still don't receive funding. Birth control and abortion may not "treat" medical conditions, but they are important tools women use to maintain their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

CORRECTION

In the article "The iceman cometh" (ODE, May 29), Charles DuPree's salary should have been listed as \$100 a day. The Emerald regrets the error.

DRAWING BOARD

The cartoon is titled "DRAWING BOARD" and is divided into two main panels. The top panel shows a man in a small boat on a body of water, with a speech bubble that says "I'M SORRY." The bottom panel shows a man sitting at a computer terminal, with a speech bubble that says "SUHARTO, STEP DOWN!!!". Below this, there are four smaller panels showing the man at the terminal with various speech bubbles: "TELETUBBIES!", "OH MY GOD! THEY'VE KILLED KENNY!", "AND NOW, HOWARD STERN!", "...AND THE WOMEN WHO LOVE THEM... NEXT JERRY SPRINGER!", "...IS THERE AN 'X' PAT?", "SCIENTISTS SAY A METEOR STORM THIS FALL COULD DESTROY TELECOMMUNICATION SATELLITES!", and "BRING ON THE METEORS...".