

Frustration and Fantasy

LET'S LOOK AT PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE

H. Rapp Brown once quipped that "violence is as American as apple pie." It seems we've spent the last fifty years proving he was right. With each massacre of innocents we rekindle our resolve to do something, to change something to, somehow, prevent the next tragedy. Everyone of us has an idea, a plan, a cure; yet, it seems nothing changes. Some suggest we should disarm everyone; we should somehow remove those 300 million firearms from our midst. Others suggest 300 million guns are not enough; we should all arm ourselves so we can save the day by killing the gunman before he can massacre those innocents. Simple response: Ain't gonna happen. We're not going to confiscate all those weapons and we are not going to arm our teachers, our clergypersons, our moviegoers and our mall-shoppers. The first suggestion is naive; the second the product of frustration and fantasy.

Instead, we need to seek sensible, practical ideas which might both make a difference and actually be enacted. They won't solve the problem, they won't cure the disease, but they would help. We need to assess the state of security in public places; address the lethality of the firearms available to citizens, and promote the identification and treatment of individuals who might become these mass killers.

First, public safety is always the balance between safety and freedom. After 9/11 we took huge strides to-

ward safety at a cost to freedom. We have become, arguably, safer at some cost to freedom and convenience, and most of us have willingly accepted that cost. After Columbine and Thurston, Virginia Tech and other horrors, we have taken steps to make our schools safer, and they are. Schools have increased security limiting access to campuses and buildings, they have lock down procedures to help protect students when there is a threat, and they have better communication procedures to request rapid response to those threats. Such measures will make our children safer, but they will never make them completely safe. We simply can't fully defend our children or ourselves from an individual willing to die while committing such horrendous attacks. Even if we were willing to provide schools the safety of a high security prison, what would we do about athletic events, playgrounds, the movies or any of the thousands of other events where children gather?

We must finally be willing to address the lethality of the firearms available to the American public. We must simply say to the NRA and other gun advocates: Hey guys, we've read the Second Amendment, and we don't want all your guns. You really don't need those assault rifles with 30 or more cartridge magazines, and you can no longer have them. We're instituting a surrender/buy back program and for a set period of time, you may surrender those weapons or magazines and be reimbursed. After that, possession of such weapons will be a federal crime.

Such an action won't cure the problem, but it would help, and we need all the help we can get.

How do we prevent individuals from taking such horrendous actions? We can attempt to protect our children and ourselves from such actions and we can attempt to limit the damage inflicted; but both actions come too late. They are reactive, they are responses to the action. We need to focus our energy and our resources on proactive, preventative measures to, somehow, interdict an individual's drift toward such action.

We need to accept the medical model for mental illness. It is a disease, it seldom gets better by itself, and left untreated, it usually gets worse, often with disastrous results for the individual and, as we've seen far too often, for others. Like so many diseases, early detection and treatment are far more effective than denial and procrastination until a severe crisis. As a society, we've been willing to incarcerate mentally ill individuals who have committed crimes at a cost \$280,000 per bed per year, but we won't adequately fund community-based treatment programs, crisis care facilities and emergency psychiatric services which might help avoid the commission of those crimes.

Mentally ill individuals are not evil, they're not weak, they're not crazy, they're ill and they need our help. It's well past time we started providing that help.

Gary Crum of Junction City is a retired teacher and counselor who worked with dysfunctional adolescents over a 28 year career in public schools, probation facilities and residential treatment facilities.

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