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A touch of socialism might tame America's killer psyche

BY WILLIAM MARSDEN, POSTMEDIA NEWS SEPTEMBER 18, 2013

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WASHINGTON, DC - SEPTEMBER 17: Police cars sit parked at the entrance to the Washington Navy Yard September 17, 2013 in Washington, DC. Defense contractor Aaron Alexis allegedly shot and killed 12 people yesterday during a shooting rampage at the Washington Navy Yard before being killed by police. His motive is still unclear. (Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Photograph by: Drew Angerer/Getty Images, Postmedia News

WASHINGTON — Outside the yellow-taped perimeter of the Washington Navy Yards where “active shooter” police squads swarmed through Building 197 in search of a mass murderer, life went on as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

As the shooter killed 12 people and the shrill voices of American commentators filled the airwaves with over-ripe details, children played in neighborhood schoolyards and tours continued to circulate through the unruffled U.S. Capitol. The people of Washington generally went about their business. Not that they were unaware or even unconcerned. They had just heard it all before.

Murderous rampages have become so commonplace in America they have reached a level of banality that has earned them their own massive, militaristic and bureaucratic response system. The shooter opens fire. Police “active shooter” squads — on call 24/7 — are deployed. The shooter either commits suicide or is shot dead. The police are declared heroes. The victims are mourned and become “patriots.” Their family photos drift ghost-like across TV screens. Friends of the shooter struggle to comprehend why such a good-natured guy would do such a terrible thing. Blame inevitably falls on, as the Chicago Tribune ruled in an editorial Tuesday, “a lethal grudge and a gun.”

After last year's Newtown, Conn. murders, American commentators debated whether they should even mention the murderer's name — Adam Lanza — for fear it might encourage other potential murderers.

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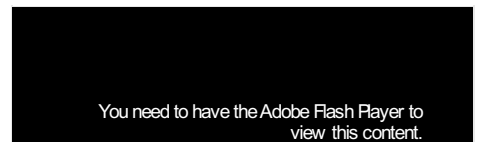
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Psychiatrist Michael Welner insisted to CNN every American had “to repudiate his (Lanza’s) behavior as disgusting” so as not to ignite the longings of fantasists seeking publicity. (One thing is certain. Lanza didn’t kill himself and 27 others so he could read about it later.)

But that hardly seems enough. Random killings have become such a unique American phenomenon that they deserve greater analysis and soul-searching than just blaming guns and grudges with the occasional foray into video games and publicity seeking. The murder of 21 primary school children in Newtown alone deserves much more.

Yet across the American landscape few experts look beyond the regular suspects. Few ask themselves why the citizens of other industrialized countries, which also have guns, grudges, video games and disenchanted populations (such as Canada), rarely indulge in mass murder. And when they do, it seems a sort of unwanted American cultural import — a one-off copycat act — like outlaw motorcycle gangs.

This is an American phenomenon. Americans do far more rampage shootings than anybody else and the problem is only getting bigger. Statistics show that Americans can expect about 3 or 4 big ones a year — many are too small to be reported — up from almost none in the 1950s.

In fact, the only thing that seems to stop Americans from killing each other is war. It took a few years to get back to mass killings after the Second World War and again after 9/11. Otherwise, the line graph shows a steady decade-on-decade increase.

Neither psychiatry nor psychology have been much use. We know that the perpetrators are eerily similar. The shooter is almost always a disaffected male who has suffered some kind of dislocation, isolation or job loss. He is often considered “mentally ill” which is a catchall term for having a range of emotional problems. If it’s a school shooting, the shooter is almost always a young adult or student. If it’s a workplace rampage or occurs at some other location the shooter is almost always middle-aged. But here again, people globally suffer emotional problems and problems of dislocation and they don’t open fire on a crowd.

One man takes the issue into a darker area of the American psyche. He is Jack Levin, a professor of criminology at Northeastern University in Boston who has studied mass murderers for more than 30 years.

“This is a collective phenomenon,” he said. “It’s about American society and American culture.”

The most important trigger for mass murder, he said, is “the eclipse of community, the decline of neighborhoods, the reduction in the communal aspects of every day life.”

In other words, the huge decades-old relocation of Americans seeking employment and a better life has created a sort of mass loneliness and hardened the American soul. Too many have no place to turn to when they get into trouble. Job loss can be particularly catastrophic because in the U.S. there is only the thinnest social welfare net. No healthcare. No financial help.

“That’s why most of these mass killers are middle-aged males,” he said. “At the very time in their lives when they feel they should reach the pinnacle of success they are instead sliding downhill fast.”

Their final gesture is to open a vengeful fire on American society.

“So that is part of American culture,” he said.

In other words, a little socialism could go a long way in saving Americans from the mass murderer within.

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Karla Kat Kitzable · Top Commenter

Petr Kratoska said>>>Consider that the least violent countries are those in western Europe, which have all "hated and strong emphasis on early childhood education. I think there is some truth in this. America has never had a good social program in place, when something happen because of the medical bills floating in and they end up trying to cope with it all. For the last few years things have no safety net to speak of and fortify yourself attitude ... makes you wonder does it not?

Reply · 1 Like · Yesterday at 10:20am



Mj Shortreed · Kitchener, Ontario

You've got to be kidding. Socialism = Communism Communism = + 100 million murdered in the last century alone. After every act of terror we are by the leftist elite told not to judge all muslims on the actions of a few. Isn't it time the tens of millions of law abiding gun owners in the USA get the same treatment?

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Blake Desaulniers · Top Commenter · University of British Columbia

Truly igonrant Reply · 7 Like · Yesterday at 9:10am



Garreth Ceegee

"Socialism = Communism" No it's not, contrary to what Fox News would have you believe

"the leftist elite told not to judge all muslims on the actions of a few" No we don't, just like how I don't judge all people from Kitchener based on the bigoted post of one per services to the mentally ill and in need. The status quo ain't working.

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Troy Frech

Socialism does NOT equal communism. This is the confusion too many people have. Communism is an e economy are controlled by the state. It would be just as valid to say the capitalism equals anarchy ber restriction on what people could do to make money. The reality is that socialism and capitalism are "ing determines the resulting "recipe" of society.

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Bryson James · Sir John A. Macdonald

If a Christian person kill someone = Mental Illness

If a Muslim person kill someone = Terrorist

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Petr Kratoska · Top Commenter · Vancouver, British Columbia

actually you've got to be kidding mj. socialism does not equate communism anymore than capitalism equals fascism. In any case, by definition of communism, George Bush became one when he bought AIG

though if this guy had known mental health issues, and a criminal record a background check might have slowed his protection if they feel they need it, but the American Medical Association study concluded that statistically, having members of your family ... See More

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Steve Dyck · Top Commenter · Realtor at Iamsold.info / Steve Dyck - Calgary Real Estate

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Steve Loxton · Top Commenter · Owner at Great Big Sound

That's a complete crock. Anyone with an ounce of discernment can see that the majority of the world's political spectrum more frequently harbours the sociopathic, individualists - those willing to exploit both populations? Do you know the RIGHT answer?

Reply · 3 Likes · Yesterday at 1:36pm



Steve Dyck · Top Commenter · Realtor at Iamsold.info / Steve Dyck - Calgary Real Estate

The world's woes are not the result of one-sided politics or personal beliefs. Get informed; you might learn

Reply · Like · 21 hours ago



Steve Loxton · Top Commenter · Owner at Great Big Sound

Steve Dyck, I didn't say that. I said "the world's woes are the result of greed and self-interest." I then self-identify as being on the right of the political spectrum. IE the opposite side from liberal socialists.

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