

HOW MANY MORE? MUSINGS ON THE PRICE OF LESSONS LEARNED SLOWLY... A TRAGEDY AT VIRGINIA TECH

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I spent the summer of 1973, the summer between my junior and senior years of college, on the campus of Virginia Tech as a Tutor-Counselor in the University's Upward Bound Program and have many fond memories of my time there. Further, I lived in Johnston Hall that summer, the site of the first two murders that took place during Monday's horrible massacre. For that reason, and because my nephew will graduate next month from the University of Virginia, the unbelievable shooting tragedy that occurred at Virginia Tech less than 48 hours ago resonated with me on a very personal level. This horrible massacre is yet again, another example of two very undeniable realities, i.e., that there are far too many guns in this society, and that those guns are far too easy to get. The fact that a person with the shooter's troubled psychiatric background was able to legally acquire a gun just as easily as a person with no such history is irrefutable evidence of those facts. After all the sniper shootings in this nation, including in recent years, those carried out by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado, John Allen Muhammad, the sniper who paralyzed the Washington, DC area for three weeks, and now, this one, committed at Virginia Tech by Seung-Hui Cho, I once again find myself wondering how many more of these horrors will, we as a nation, have to experience before we get control of the American gun lobby.

To the many who say that "Guns don't kill people. People kill people", I say this: That's a totally specious argument and you know it. Why? Because it's a half-truth, and a half-truth is no better than a whole lie. The **half** truth is that people kill people. The **whole** truth is that people kill people **with guns**. I haven't seen many mass murders carried out with knives or slingshots in the news lately, and I doubt that anyone has. If the Virginia Tech shooter **had** gone on his mad rampage with a knife, the loss of life would not have been nearly as high. **It is only because he had Glock 19 and Walther P22 semi-automatic pistols, that thirty-plus people lost their lives.**

Look, this just isn't rocket science. Quite simply, the more guns there are in a society, the more guns will be **used** in that society. The fewer guns there are in a society, the fewer guns will be **used** in that society. Period. I challenge any gun advocate to dispute that obvious fact. Further, I challenge gun advocates to answer the following question honestly: "If you either had or have, or soon or someday will have a college-age child, would you prefer that s/he live on a campus on which guns are abundant, perhaps at which every student, faculty member and staff person has a gun, or would you prefer your child to live on a campus at which guns were rare, and perhaps even banned?"

This country is like the doggone Wild, Wild West. It has gone wild. Do we, as Americans, have a Second Amendment, constitutionally guaranteed right to own guns? Of course. Should all guns be banned? Of course not. As both a lawyer, and a pragmatist, I consider those two things obvious. What I consider **equally** as obvious, however, are the following: 1. We do **not** have a legal right to own **any kind** of gun, such as military-style, automatic assault rifles and pistols; and, 2. It is wise to do background checks on would-be gun owners to ensure their mental health. Tragically,

the American gun lobby supports the former, opposes the latter and holds all the power in this matter.

I feel annoyed and utterly frustrated by this issue. More than my annoyance and my frustration, however, I feel deep sympathy for the families of all of those innocent college kids who lost their lives so senselessly. I simply cannot imagine the pain of parents burying their child.

The fundamental truth is that just as with gladiator sports, and “witch” burnings, and the torture and imprisonment of scientists, and colonialism, and slavery, and Jim Crow, and apartheid and the Berlin Wall, and all other social evils, this too, this insane power of the American gun lobby over a handful of politicians, will someday end. My fear is that many more will die before that day arrives.

I just wonder why as human beings, we learn our lessons so very slowly. In this and in so many other areas, we are paying a tremendous price of human suffering for being such slow learners.

I extend my very sincere sympathy to all the families who lost loved ones in this unspeakable tragedy.

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