

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Latest school shooting leaves vexing problems

While U.S. and NATO forces try to bomb Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic into relenting on a years-long "ethnic cleansing" campaign that has left thousands of Kosovar Albanians dead and hundreds of thousands of refugees, Americans are trying to cope with the latest carnage to hit small-town America.

On Tuesday, two black trench-coated students, strapped with guns and explosives, swept through a suburban high school in Littleton, Colo. in a suicide attack that left 15 people dead, authorities claim.

The gunmen — both juniors at Columbine High School — were found dead in the school library with self-inflicted gunshot wounds and bombs around their bodies. The killers belonged to a group called the "Trench Coat Mafia." They wore long black coats, talked about owning guns and disliked blacks, Hispanics and football players. Students said they liked playing war games and re-enacting World War II battles.

Said President Clinton of the bloodiest school shooting in U.S. history: "Perhaps now America will wake up to the dimensions of this challenge, if it could happen in a place like Littleton."

In the past two years, a series of school shootings have rocked the country. Two people were killed in an attack in Pearl, Miss., three in West Paducah, Ky., five in Jonesboro, Ark., and two in Springfield, Ore.

Demands for tighter security, stricter laws and monitoring of troubled students have increased. The Colorado Legislature has been debating a bill that would allow people to carry concealed weapons. Had staff been able to carry concealed weapons, the tragedy could have been stopped, say the bill's opponents. The bill's detractors say the shooting point to a society infatuated with violence and drunk on guns.

It should come as no surprise that the killers in the Denver shooting were armed to the teeth. There are more than 235 million guns in America, nearly one for every man, woman and child. Countless other guns — some banned by laws stemming from Brady legislation — flow through the black market and onto the streets in inner cities and rural towns.

The culture of violence long thought to be the domain of America's inner-city high schools has crept into America's heartland and left all Americans wondering what's wrong with our children.

America needs to redefine its domestic priorities. The debate will rage on Capitol Hill for as long as the Kosovo conflict drags on: Should America commit ground troops to the effort? But once it's over, another question will remain: Should the United States concentrate less on being policeman for the world and more on shoring up its own problems?

BRAXIN, 3/1999



"...UM, A VIRUS CAME IN MY E-MAIL AND, UH, ATE THE GRIGBY CONTRACT..."

Tide of compassion needed to stem violence

Special to Sentinel-Voice

"The interior of Kosovo is a wasteland of burned villages and wandering farm animals, empty of ethnic Albanians but swarming with Serbian forces..."

In the face of the wrenching descriptions of the bloodshed and misery in Central Europe, like these words from a recent *New York Times* dispatch, who among us has not felt the lure of just letting the mind go numb, of turning away from the horror of it?

How can one contemplate that human beings can do this?

How can one understand how it came to be that various ethnic groups who once lived literally side by side now seem to be intent on slaughtering each other or any other group who appears to stand in the way of their perverted goal of creating a national homeland?


How is it that so-called soldiers, who were once ordinary citizens living ordinary lives, have now become men who murder and rape unarmed civilians?

How is it that these countries, which once seemed to have both the governmental structure and the cultural commitment to resist a descent into the kind of barbarism that ravaged Europe a half a century ago, have so easily turned into killing fields?

The lure to turn away from this horror is made all the more powerful by the unavoidable fact that it's not

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
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just the Balkans where such brutality has recently occurred or is occurring.

Five years ago the same sort of mass savagery happened in Rwanda, where the Hutu killed more than 500,000 Tutsis in less than four months. Before that, it happened in Bosnia.

And one could go on: the list of places where ethnic- or religious-based outbreaks recur periodically these days is, gloomily, too long.

These tides of violence sweeping around the world are powerful evidence that, for all the progress we humans have made in many areas, the veneer of "civilization" at the end of the twentieth century is still as thin as an egg shell.

But those Americans who feel the numbness of apathy coming on ought to do two things. For one, they ought to personalize the issue.

They ought to imagine themselves as one of the 315,000 ethnic Albanians who have been driven from Kosovo in the last three weeks — forced out of their homes, pushed out of their homeland, in many instances literally with a gun to their backs, often separated from others

in their family, bereft of resources, with nothing but the clothes they are wearing.

If that were our situation, if that were our children's situation, how would we hope the rest of the world would respond?

In these places, where the experience of a war being waged on one's home soil and the memories of what it's like to be a refugee have not been forgotten, there has been an extraordinary outpouring of aid for the Kosovar refugees.

From these countries thousands of tons of foodstuffs and other materials, from computers to water purification equipment,

and millions of dollars have been donated.

It's clear that this is not being given as "charity."

It is being given because those who give understand that this is what human beings owe to other human beings who find themselves in a crisis.

It is being given because those who are giving have refused to take refuge in the false idea that we are not our brother's keeper, our sister's keeper, wherever those brothers and sisters happen to be.

Of course, there are many in the United States who have rushed to donate foodstuffs and other material, too.

They understand the point Elie Wiesel made Monday evening during a White House symposium on the twentieth century and the "perils of indifference."

Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust and who ever since has been one of those individuals who speaks as humanity's conscience, told (See Kosovo, Page 20)

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