Mass Shootings and the Media

Why do we have mass shootings? What has changed? It isn't the weapons. Americans have had guns for as long as there have been Americans. Kids too. Some people want to blame mental health, but that doesn't explain it either. Even if we ignore the fact that the mentally ill are not typically violent (indeed, they are far more likely to harm themselves than others), there have always been crazy people.

"It's racism!" some people insist. Really? If you graphed racist beliefs in this country, you would see a steady decline over the last century. If racism led to mass shootings, they would be declining. None of the typical reasons blamed for these crimes actually explain why someone would be more inclined to commit a mass shooting in 2019 than in 1959.

So, what has changed?

The answer, to me at least, is obvious. It's the media. The media as it exists in 2019 is perhaps the most notable change from the world we inhabited half a century ago. Non-stop, politicized pronouncements of doom and gloom spill forth from every screen, every speaker, and every form of communication. Tales of death and crime terrify and titillate in turn.

Those who feel angry and want the world to know it now have an opportunity that never before existed. They can take control of the news cycle for days or even weeks simply by committing an act of mass violence. Regardless of if they live or die, their name and face will gain a level of exposure that rivals the most notable celebrity or politician. They can be famous, even achieve a certain type of perverse immortality. All they have to do is kill some random strangers.

A well-known politician has declared that "the media is the enemy of the people." While his pronouncement may have been self-serving, it contained at least an element of truth. The media uses fear as a currency. It stokes controversy and creates enemies. It wants you to believe that it is doing a service, providing a public good. The truth is far more sinister. The media is creating the climate of hate and fear that inspires mass shooters. The media itself has become one of the most destructive forces in our society.

Instead of providing news and information, the media manufactures misinformation spun from opinion, conjecture, and political meddling. The media has constructed a world of danger and delusion to justify its own existence. And people just keep tuning in.

Unfortunately, there is no easy or obvious solution. I can advise you to turn off your T.V., cancel your cable subscription, and boycott your local newspaper, but until a majority does the same, the malevolence will continue to spread. All I can really suggest is that you

recognize your real enemy. It isn't your neighbors or the folks on the other side of town. It isn't those who voted for that politician you hate. It isn't immigrants or racists or whatever other hobgoblins the media has concocted for you to dread.

The media wants you fearful and suspicious, worried and angry. When you are, you are more controllable. You keep tuning in to learn who else you should hate. Stop allowing yourself to be controlled! Stop buying the bullshit that the media delivers by the dump truck load. Turn it off and tune it out. Talk to real people. You'll probably find that you have a lot more in common than you have been led to believe, because—despite what the media tells you—it's not actually a war zone out there.